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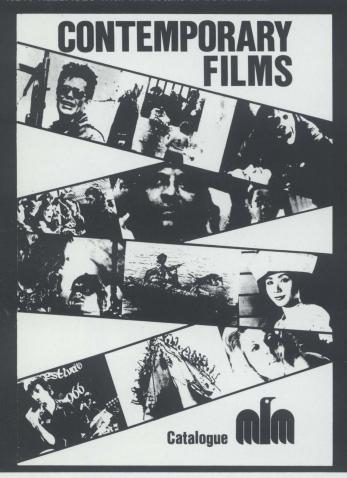








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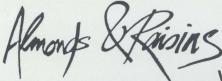
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# SIGHT & SOUND

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### **IN THE PICTURE**

### Spitting Image

### Lampoon from Limehouse

'We hate puppets.' This comment comes from sophisticated puppetmakers Peter Fluck and Roger Law, better known as Luck and Flaw, and is followed by one, slightly less mystifying, from Law: 'They're a means to an end.' The end in this case is Central Television's series Spitting Image, which is peopled with lifelike puppet caricatures of the rich, powerful and famous, guaranteed to ruffle many feathers and put some very well known noses out of joint. The effect is like Yes, Minister with teeth, as if Scarfe's cartoons had come to life, or much of Madame Tussaud's had suddenly stepped out of different distorting

Everyone who thinks he is anyone is there, from Ronald Reagan to Mick Jagger; though some might argue they are already caricatures. 'The great attraction is that you can get anyone in the world on your programme,' says Jon Blair, one of the series' two producers. 'The problem is that you have to build your cast.' Mrs Thatcher is, of course, a star of the show; she has a weekly briefing session with the Queen. To her creators she is known as 'the bearded lady'. During a prelaunch visit to the production's Limehouse workshop, I watched Law painting the Thatcher lips the right shade of hard red, 'like Evita'. Fluck explained her appeal to him. 'Thatcher is doing everything to help us all. It had to be done. Enough is enough. You can not go through life enjoying yourself.'

Elsewhere in the workshop part of the journalist Janet Street-Porter is clamped in a vice; the finished character is a sort of octopus-like blob topped with a head and a long flexible nose like a proboscis, for sniffing out juicy stories. Nearby is the first stage of an Oscar-winning film director who seems to have only a bit part. He has large sideburns that flap out 'when he gets especially pompous', explains Fluck mischievously. Wandering into the costume section, I confront Bernard Levin, finished in loving detail, next to a piranha-like Enoch Powell.

If Luck and Flaw have any affection for their rogues' gallery, it does not show in their rubber, foam and plaster creations. Spitting Image does not belong to the comfortable world of TV impersonators who, as Blair puts it, make 'essentially unlovable people lovable.' It is both comedy and satire, in either order for importance, depending on the sketch. When a puppet Reagan delivers an



Spitting Image: Luck and Flaw's view of the Queen and Prince Andrew.

address about guns and butter to the nation 'from the 75th floor', with a real sharp-shooter and a real pat of butter in front of him, and forgets all his lines, one simultaneously laughs and winces. When Reagan and Thatcher are later caught in a bit of hankypanky, the satire is biting and, due to the puppets, the parody of flesh-and-blood emotions faintly obscene.

The most potent image-building occurs on television and so these images come in for strong attack. For Tony Hendra, one of the chief writers (of whom there is a core of about ten, and perhaps two hundred in all), 'There is no real Maggie Thatcher except the one I see on TV.' He recently had the disturbing experience of meeting one of his characters. After a hard morning working on the puppet Roy Hattersley, he went to a Punch lunch and found himself sitting opposite ... Roy Hattersley. He could not bring himself to exchange a word.

It was, in fact, the Labour Party's deputy leadership election that brought Blair, South African born and then a producer of some ten years' standing in TV current affairs with no experience of producing comedy, together with Luck and Flaw. They were commissioned to do the heads of the three contenders as programme titles. At that time Luck and Flaw's work was well known only in print, notably in the Sunday Times. The idea of animating such heads arose seriously during 1982, and John Lloyd, of Not The Nine O'Clock News, joined Blair as joint producer. The money for a pilot costing a substantial £150,000 was eventually raised in September 1982, from Central Television and other sources. Blair reckons it 'one of the most expensive light entertainment series ever.' Studio space to build probably the biggest puppet workshop anywhere was hired at Limehouse in the cavernous, now deserted warehouses of London's dockland.

The major difficulty, in a production fraught with new problems, was to make puppets that would stand up to a topical weekly show requiring recognisable appearances capable of lifelike movements. This vision was far removed from either the long and expensive shooting schedules of a special-effects movie like The Dark Crystal, the stop-frame animation techniques used in the recent Wind in the Willows, or the family entertainment of Jim Henson's relatively simple Muppets. Spitting Image has great respect for Henson's achievement and has used some of his co-workers, but, as Blair points out, 'By a process of elimination we arrived at a bastardised puppet, much more complicated than the Muppets. The basic Muppet is an orange sliced in two.'

By going back to first principles, Luck and Flaw were able to evolve systems of operation and processes of manufacture that met the demands of the programme idea. Most parts of the puppet body can, if necessary for the script, be made to move in quite complex ways. Characters were initially chosen mainly for their newsworthiness, by consensus of the Gang of Five, by now directors of their own production

company: Blair, Lloyd, Hendra and Luck and Flaw. 'As we got closer to production, priorities had to be established,' Blair says. 'Who is needed this week, who next week? Gradually the scripts have become the tyranny.' It is not always so clear which side of the mirror one is on. The answer is obvious in the workshop notice that reads 'Queen's blink not working,' but what about the one that reads 'Clive James' shirt too tight'?

ANDREW ROBINSON

### **Poland**

### Film-makers and the government

The eagerly awaited Congress of the Polish Film-makers' Associ-ation (FMA) finally took place in Warsaw on 11-12 December 1983. Along with all the other cultural associations in Poland, the FMA had been officially 'suspended' during martial law. But unlike the journalists, the writers, the actors and the graphic artists, Poland's movie-makers chose to avoid the forcible dissolution of their Association by accepting at the start of June 1983 a compromise with the Polish regime. This compromise, suggested by the then chairman of the FMA, Andrzej Wajda, involved the resignation of the whole governing board of the FMA. This had been demanded by the authorities. The FMA thereby gained official permission to hold a national congress which would be free to elect a new governing board. Part of the deal included Wajda's undertaking not to stand as a candidate.

In accepting this arrangement, the FMA leadership clearly risked the suggestion that they had chosen the easy way out. It's likely that the argument behind this compromise is that, without it, the Polish regime would simply have dissolved the FMA, formed a puppet Association in much the same manner as it has for every other cultural association, with the inevitable loss of finance for all those directors who had refused the compromise. In other words, the compromise was probably accepted by the former FMA leadership to preserve a chance that officially disliked moviemakers would not find it impossible to make films.

Will the FMA succeed in retaining a fraction of the independence it possessed before December 1981? Official reports from Poland don't suggest that one can hope for this. On 14 November 1983—one month before the Congress—an official comment from the Presidium of the National Council for Culture stated that the reform of the cinema industry would combine the interests of film-makers and of

the cultural administration (i.e. the State), 'guaranteeing the right of State patronage to make its position known with regard to the fundamental issues of filmmaking and distribution.' This means that the 'reform' builds into itself a guarantee for the regime to interfere at every point of the industry, on every aspect of production. Given the official bias now well established, the FMA has effectively colluded in its own crippling rather than force the regime to take the unpalatable step of formally banning it.

The Congress elected as Chairman Janusz Majewski, as Deputy Chairmen Tadeusz Chmielewski, Jerzy Hoffman and Marek Nowicki. Apart from Hoffman, none of the FMA leaders is known in the West. Majewski has largely made-for-TV movies to his credit, and Nowicki is completely unknown. According to the official news agency PAP's report on this, the 6th Congress, 'the debaters said that the model of the Association practised in 1980-81 proved to be useless.' The Congress thanked Wajda for his long service, adding that the Congress 'closed a certain chapter in the history of the Association in which it had drifted towards an involvement in the political controversies of 1980-81.' PAP further reported that the Congress 'had resisted the few calls to disband the Association ... the results of the Congress confirm a process of positive changes and national agreement taking place in the entire Polish intelligentsia.' It forgot to add 'except for the journalists, writers, actors.

The FMA clearly believes it possible to recognise the status quo without being accused of betraying its principles. It fully supported Solidarity during 1980-81, and while every other cultural association has abided by that support, the FMA has in some senses turned its back on Solidarity. The FMA leadership would argue that it's now pointless to continue a struggle against such entrenched and ruthless control as Jaruzelski's regime exerts, and particularly so for the cinema industry, relying as it does entirely on State finance. This pragmatism, opportunism, call it what you will, must deal a serious blow to the more resolute of Poland's cultural workers, who have opted for the far more difficult course of principled opposition.

Of course the Polish authorities are not so politically crass as to say bluntly 'from now on, no more films that theaten the Polish Communist Party's right to rule,' but the tendency is precisely in that direction. The official daily, Trybuna Ludu, which dismissed Wajda's Danton and Love in Germany as 'far removed from the progressive social movements of



Australian past. Lousy Little Sixpence: an Aboriginal nurse and her charges.

the West European countries where he works,' stated on 15 November 1983 that 'the most significant output of a Polish director may only be made in response to the needs of Polish society ... and drawing on the most progressive intellectual and ideological attainments of the nation.' And what Polish Minister of Culture these days will dare to finance a film that doesn't come under these criteria?

Following the Congress, the FMA leadership met General Jaruzelski and, according to official reports, confirmed the Congress' will 'to co-operate with the authorities in the interest of development of national culture and cinematography.' In return, Jaruzelski said that 'Polish cinema has full possibilities to rebuild its social and artistic position.' The most significant implications of the Congress, however, are that it undoubtedly brought about a crucial propaganda victory for the regime.

GARY MEAD

### Australia

### Depression down under

Someone once suggested a paradigm of an emergent film industry in which there were half a dozen stages: wild enthusiasm, total chaos, utter despair, search for the guilty, persecution of the innocent, and rewarding of the incompetent. Few people in the Australian cinema would have difficulty recognising some if not all of these. What they might disagree on, though, is which stage

the industry is trapped in at present, and, more important, how it can escape.

Financially, the industry is far from healthy. A privately commissioned survey last year reported that out of the 247 films of every description made since the creation of the Australian Film Development Corporation in 1970, less than a dozen have made a profit. This in itself has been enough to discourage investment. But more important has been the Labour Government's decision-despite repeated assurances to the contrary—to reduce the previous 150 per cent tax write-off concession in film investment to 133 per cent. In so doing they have squeezed projects already in production and made potential investors suspicious of further changes. They have also, by means of an increased grant, restored considerable authority to the Australian Film Commission, government department which oversees the industry. Private investors, who for the last couple of years have had things pretty much their own way, are now moving into the safer areas of mini-series and TV movies, or turning their backs on the cinema completely.

There has, too, been an inevitable talent drain—something for which the Australian cinema itself can hardly be held responsible, but from which it has undoubtedly suffered. The three Australian directors with international reputations, Peter Weir, Bruce Beresford and Fred Schepisi, are all working in the USA. And Mel Gibson—easily the country's biggest box-office attraction—has

succumbed to the lure of Hollywood and a series of films which will keep him out of Australia for some time to come. So who and what remains?

The answer to this depends very much on who one talks to. There are many theories as to the current slump in the film industry, and many people more than willing to voice them. For James Mitchell, former executive director of the Film and Television Producers Association of Australia, part of the responsibility for the high failure rate lies with the AFC. 'I think it has been very much their fault for not killing off enough turkeys in embryo at the development stage,' he says. 'They're a bureaucracy, they do actually have money to fling around, if you like-except that too often it's been flung in the wrong direction.'

The veteran film-maker Ken Hall also has strong words ('Ill-considered, inexperienced, bland, self-indulgent') for those writers and directors who have followed their intellectual instincts at the expense of commercial considerations. In a new book on the Australian cinema he mocks 'those little girls in short pants' who, he claims, have driven the Australian public away from the cinema by their cultural elitism.

All of which rather begs the question of exactly what kind of films an industry in a young and cosmopolitan country of only 13 million people should be making. To a certain extent, the tensions and confusions in the cinema are symptomatic of the continuing cultural crisis in Australian society itself. Novelist Thomas Keneally, who has close links with the industry, and who is currently working on the screenplay of his bestseller Schindler's Ark (which Steven Spielberg will eventually direct for Universal), says that the major issue is that of a national identity. 'Australians at the moment, particularly the new generation, are very possessed by this question of a national culture. We were brought up to believe that poetry and art existed in the Hemisphere, and Northern cricket and sheep-raising in ours. We've always been in a kind of cultural bind.'

If Keneally and other writers have solved this problem by finding a sense of continuity (in Keneally's case, in Aboriginal culture) while at the same time exploring larger, more universal themes that guarantee them an audience overseas, film-makers are clearly much more confused. The result has been a heavy emphasis on period films that have examined white Australian history, often to the exclusion of anything else. This attitude is fiercely defended in Australia: so much so that the lukewarm commercial reception of the films

### IN THE PICTURE



Nirad Mohapatra's Maya Miriga.

internationally—Igor Auzan's We of the Never Never is one title that springs to mind—is met with genuine surprise at home.

James Mitchell thinks that the time has come for Australians to make films about the way they are now; which means not only more films from and about 'New Australians', but also taking a closer look at some hitherto ignored aspects of Australian culture. 'Maybe it's too close to home, but what about our own social tensions between Catholics and Protestants, city people and country folk, the inescapable variations in manners, class attitudes and values which aren't supposed to exist in Australia's democratic society?

While this is obviously a valid point (and one that many directors are beginning to take note of), some people in the industry reject the claim that such films could be commercially successful even in Australia itself. 'We've got one of the most potentially volatile social mixes in the world,' says one director, now working in television, 'and one of the highest levels of apathy. Australians have got what they came here for, by and large: sunshine and a better way of life. They're not interested in politics, the world scene, and certainly not in films about themselves being unhappy.'

Meanwhile, there is some hope amid the general gloom, mainly centred on the appointment in March of Kim Williams as new Chief Executive of the Australian Film Commission. He's a young (30), creative and well-respected administrator, and seems to offer the best sign yet that the Australian cinema might eventually recover from its present malaise.

PAUL MANSFIELD

### Bombay

India's Middle Way

Filmotsav 84, the non-competitive Indian Festival, reached Bombay this year-the self-proclaimed cinema city of the east. It was there eight years ago that the Film Development Corporation, encouraged by Western critics, had decided upon an annual Indian Panorama in which to display the latest goods of the home-grown Parallel Cinema. Now they tend to call it the Indian Parallel and Middle Cinema-Parallel meaning 'artistic' and Middle denoting a mixture of art and commerce.

A bevy of French critics and festival spies joined the indefatigable English at the Panorama screenings in Bombay, and the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes took away with it the one outstanding surprise of the programme of twenty-one films-Nirad Mohapatra's Maya Miriga (The Mirage). This gentle and satisfying debut from Orissa, about the struggle of a middleclass family to get ahead without splitting up, surely heralds a major new talent. Mohapatra, a lecturer at the Pune Film Institute, handles an amateur cast superbly as he weaves his quiet tale about a local schoolmaster worrying about the education of his five children and then finding, when success draws the great hope of the family away to Delhi, that family unity gradually disintegrates under the pressure.

The great virtue of the film lies in its sense of atmosphere, and the director's sympathy with each of his characters. The detail is consistently subtle, like the conversations about family responsibility between the head of the household and his old walking friend. Not for a moment does Mohapatra put inapposite words into the mouths of the two companions but the basis of the film is there, just as it is within the marvellous portrayal of the old grandmother, a fount of wisdom in emergency. This is the sort of film which looks comparatively unambitious but has an authority and a command of its material that is rare enough anywhere nowadays.

Otherwise, the Panorama proved disappointing, largely because the higher than usual number of films from the South, relentlessly pursuing the Middle Way, seemed neither one thing nor the other. The two most interesting were T. S. Nagabharana's Banker Margayya, taken from the R. K. Narayan story about a village financier who makes and loses a fortune; and K. G. George's Lekha's Death, A Flashback, which told the apparently true story of a teenage superstar of the Malayalam cinema who not long ago committed suicide. Banker Margayya was highly praised by Narayan, who generally hates the films made from his books. But the story was set in the 1920s and suffered because it had been only vaguely placed in period. Lekha's Death gives a fascinating glimpse of the Madras film business but was much too long at two and three-quarter hours.

Mrinal Sen's *The Ruins*, which opened the festival, was an intriguing change of direction—the story of a city-bred photographer who spends a country weekend with some friends at a ruined estate where a lonely girl, forsaken by her betrothed, tries to

keep her ailing mother alive with the hope that he will return. Sen's films are always full of moral dilemmas, and this one revolves round the photographer's attraction to the girl and whether or not he should pretend to the mother that he is, in fact, her daughter's betrothed. Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah and Gita Sen (the director's wife) are among an excellent cast, the ruins look lovely and the film has the strength of a contemporary fable. But choppy editing, an inappropriate Westernised score and, again, its length are against it.

From Bombay itself came Govind Nihalani's striking Half Truth, a film about police corruption that has had a huge success everywhere in India despite its low budget and artistic ambition. Tickets in Delhi, for instance, were selling on the black market for ten times their original price, which makes it a Middle Cinema phenomenon. Om Puri is very fine as the incorruptible cop, submerged within a system which makes honesty an impossibility. And Nihalani's portrait of him as a kind of sexually repressed Dirty Harry may look a trifle obvious to Western eyes but is certainly audacious in India, where the authorities are very nervous about the guardians of the law. There are disadvantages. The relationship between the policeman and his gentle, puzzled girlfriend (Smita Patil) is not satisfactorily worked out. But the general atmosphere of a society within which corruption is endemic gives the film a formidable punch.

Elsewhere, Filmotsav 84, organised in a hurry by the Directorate of Film Festivals under its new leader, A. Viren Luther, had a huge programme on display. India's cinema city, however, did not support it so well as to suggest that the festival's permanent site will now be in Bombay rather than bureaucratic Delhi. The proceedings were opened by Raj Kapoor with an impassioned plea that we should make films, not war. But, alas, his superstar friends of the commercial industry were not much in evidence at the screenings. Bombay was festooned with posters for the event, paid for by them, and every evening was graced with a giant party. You did feel, though, that if Bergman, Fellini and Spielberg had wandered into any of them, they would probably have gone unrecognised. Cinema city, India, is even more self-absorbed than cinema city, Hollywood. But with rather less reason, since the video pirates are out and about, busy cutting a good many fat, financial throats. This, some said, was why attendances were down this year, and everyone is screaming for Government intervention before it is too late.

DEREK MALCOLM

### Anthropology in Florence

Marion Davies, trash and a thrush whistle . . .

That the tribes of Hollywood would sooner or later end up as material for the Margaret Meads isn't exactly surprising. Nor was it unexpected that for the 24th edition of the heroically named Festival of Peoples' in Florence, the largest audiences at the freeentrance screenings (inopportunely organised at simultaneous times at different ends of the city) should have been for the section titled 'Films on Films', now a feature of any festival worthy of the name but here given particular significance by the sociological context of the whole event.

The showpiece of this section was the final-night screening of King Vidor's Show People, with the director's daughter Suzanne present and admitting to some of us that she now regrets not allowing her father to come to the London Film Festival screening in 1982. 'He might have died a few months earlier, but at least he would have had the satisfaction of seeing the film presented so wonderfully with Carl Davis' musical accompaniment.' Ms Vidor anyway was given the satisfaction of hearing Davis conduct his music in the city where Muti and Abbado are at home.

Apart from the rather makeshift orchestra which the festival had provided, the main problem was in finding an adequate 'thrush whistle' to accompany Marion Davies' pursing of her pretty lips. It seemed that on the phone from London, a diligent American-speaking organiser had understood that the 'Maestro' wanted a 'trash'. As a result, when he arrived at the Palazzo dei Congressi auditorium, Davis found dustbin lids waiting for him with the drums and the harps. A 'thrush whistle' was eventually produced but as it needed watering during the performance, by the end of the last reel the noise which emerged from Miss Davies' mouth made one think she was about to give the signal for a train to depart.

The festival also included several documentaries about film-making, such as Nigel Wattis' South Bank Show on Local Hero and Donatello Baglivo's engrossing 100-minuter about Tarkovsky and Nostalghia. But the sociologists found more raw material for studying the Hollywood tribes in pictures like Cukor's What Price Hollywood? and above all in von Sternberg's extraordinary Last Command (shown unfortunately without any music), the one about the Czar's cousin extra. The scenes of the breadline at the studio costume department as the émigrés battle to get their uniforms for the revolutionary sequence was indeed an astounding 'social' document, as much as any ethnological documentary on the Third World that we were seeing in the main section of the Festival of Peoples.

It was in fact even more revealing on Hollywood than the three hours of footage from the UCLA archives which Geoff Gilmore and Robert Rosen had lovingly assembled for the occasion under the title 'Hollywood on Hollywood'. There were some curious titbits hidden in the rather conventional promotional footage (the trip round the Disney studios in 1941 was somewhat more rewarding than the visits to MGM and Universal in the 20s). There was Bette Davis in a wartime propaganda short telling children not to expect presents this Christmas (1941) as mummy was buying war bonds. And there was Uncle Carl (Laemmle) sending out alarming signals in 1932 about the crisis in the industry and on another occasion being fêted at his company's 25th anniversary party by a rather sour looking staff, with all the stars and directors queuing to shake his hand (and von Stroheim not too happy about it)

But the bonne bouche for Italians was inevitably the clip unearthed of a screen test done for a Hollywood studio in 1934 by Vittorio De Sica. Evidently they had seen Camerini's What Rascals Men Are! in which De Sica the debonair romantic charmer sang a popular song, Parlami d'amor Mariù. Fortunately,

up working in Hollywood as an I neither his acting nor his singing (and certainly not his English) was good enough to win him a contract, otherwise the story of neo-realism might have been quite different.

> As for the major section of the Festival dei Popoli, this year's jury, presided over by Pierre Kast, will probably pass into the annals of festival history for having given one of the three top awards to a film not in the competition. In addition to the well-deserved awards for Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's First Contact, a brilliant example of how film-makers can revisit a location many years after a first film was made there (the inland tribes of New Guinea being the subject), and for Chris Marker's Sunless, the third Golden Marzocco (Florence's standard, a rampant lion with lily) went to Miklos Jancsó's somewhat selfindulgent but moodily poetic documentary Budapest.

> Only after the jury made its decision was it discovered that the film had already been shown on RAI's 3rd Channel, so didn't qualify. It is one of Giacomo Pezzali's nobly intentioned series on European cultural capitals visited by famous directors. Two others in the series were also shown: Angelopoulos' Athens, in which naked young men in military caps, belts and boots roam embarrassingly around the Parthenon as if they were looking for the local S/M club; and Olmi's enchanting Milano '83, which has upset many in Milan because the city is captured in images of its people who don't look as if they have made much social progress since De Sica's Miracle in Milan.

> > JOHN FRANCIS LANE

### In the desert

Stig Björkman mines his traditions in the Sahara

'If you include me, we are actually twelve,' said Swedish film director Stig Björkman when I visited him in Ouarzazat, south of the High Atlas in the Moroccan part of the Sahara desert. He was shooting his sixth feature, Behind the Shutters, and I was astonished to find him working with a total crew of only eleven people. 'But the dozen include my producer, Katinka Farago, and my Moroccan contact man, Mohammed Abbazi. If I had to include more than one grip, one electrician, one costume designer and one makeup artist, I couldn't make the film. After all, for less than threequarters of a million dollars I'm shooting a major film on location.'

There was no question that the minicrew was making a maxifilm. Gunnel Lindblom, Erland Josephson, Domiziana Giordano, Jonas Bergström and Vlado Juras take the main roles. The film's strange interplay of emotions is reminiscent of both Bergman, with whom Björkman has worked extensively, and Antonioni: disappearing bodies, substitute jealousies, the search for salvation in exotic settings, reality and dreams intermingling. It all takes place on the edge of civilisation and on the edge of sanity.

The original title of this Swedish-Danish co-production is Bakom Jalusin, which has the untranslatable advantage of meaning both 'behind shutters' and 'behind jealousy'. While the standard Swedish gambit (disintegrating marriage) mercifully



(Emil Jannings) who has ended | Stig Björkman (in white hat) and his unit in the Sahara. Photo: Deborah Beer.

### IN THE PICTURE

supplies only the point of departure—husband off to the wilds to seek solace; a writer, no less—the road that Björkman has his hero take is far from standard. Halfway between Pirandello and Camus, our expectations are wrung dry and flung back in our faces. This is no film about the relativity of the real or about the sanity of the insane: it is, rather, a Hitchcockian exercise in double-bottom murder. But reality simply escapes.

Does the woman get killed or doesn't she? Or is the one who gets killed the right one? Did the body disappear or wasn't it there in the first place? And was that her lover or her husband's accomplice? Perhaps both? And does it matter? Björkman happily acknowledges his debt to Hitchcock, to Antonioni: he will not deny his origins. For eight years, from 1964, he edited Chaplin, still Sweden's only serious film magazine: its name another debt paid to tradition. He has also made a film and written a book about Bergman, he has worked with Losey and Antonioni, and continues to be one of Sweden's top film critics. He has scripted all his six features and seven documentaries.

Of course, working with a crew which is less than half the size of that for a small regular film, and thirty times smaller than the crew of the last film I had seen shot in Morocco, John Huston's The Man Who Would Be King, creates a family atmosphere on the set. Besides, more than half the eleven have worked together many times before, mostly on films by Ingmar Bergman, another director who benefits from the Swedish system of allowing creative personalities to work in a creative atmosphere, not choked by a hundred technicians. 'The high critical tradition of our entire cinema could never have been established,' I heard, 'if our artists had been hampered by rules and demands such as beset the film craft in other industrialised countries.' But suffice to say that the feeling here was one of adventure, of a good cause: the make-up woman was also the clapperboy, the producer herself assisted the soundman, Erland Josephson drove the jeep.

Stig Björkman, the director of this story of projections and voyeurism, of people acting the lives of others, real people becoming fictions and fictions becoming real, calls himself primarily an observer. 'And of course this is a film which tells the story of an observer, a voyeur. I favour little details and many of my films are composed of them. But maybe film-makers are all voyeurs: from a safe distance they observe life and if it doesn't correspond to their fantasy then they have the tool to change it.'

GIDEON BACHMANN

## Policing the pirates

FACT reports on its first year in operation

With tentative optimism, the film and video industry, at least as represented by the watchdog organisation FACT (Federation Against Copyright Theft), sees the nick-of-time enactment of the Copyright Legislation Bill, which entered the Statute Book last July after being passed on the final day of parliamentary business before the election, as a potential turning point in the fight to contain video piracy in Britain.

The organisation was formed in January 1983 as a united-front response by the industry to a situation in which pirate operations had accounted for an estimated 60 per cent of the 1982 UK software takings: in round figures, £120m out of a £200m turnover. (In addition to this, though inevitably impossible to calculate, is the knock-on effect of lost cinema admissions.) Against figures like these, FACT'S 1983 operating budget of approximately £1m, subscribed by member companies, looks modest enough.

As Mr Bob Birch, the organisation's director general, put it to a press conference earlier this spring, last summer's legislation had the dual effect of bestowing powers of search on police investigating video piracy and of increasing penalties to a level at which it becomes worth a police force's while to pursue such investigations. In any event, FACT reports that as a consequence of its initiatives and of police readi-

ness to co-operate, some fifty search warrants were executed between the passing of the Act and the end of last year, and a total of nearly 30,000 'infringing' cassettes seized. At a 'conservative estimate', FACT puts the street value of these at upwards of £1m (in proportionate terms, of course, a small slice of the action).

At the heart of the matter lies the safeguarding of film prints, and Mr Peter Duffy, formerly of Scotland Yard and now FACT's director of investigations, regaled the assembled press with a série noire narrative of stake-outs at suburban cinemas, tailing operations and raids on pirate headquarters. A total of sixteen people were stated to be awaiting trial on charges under the Act. More pointed legal deterrents are perceived as a discouragement not only to the entrepreneurs but to the middle-men (though it is fair to add that there is an unofficial school of thought in the industry which maintains that some retailers now finding themselves on hard times had previously been cushioned from economic reality precisely by the widespread availability to them of pirate goods). Last summer's Flashdance, however, was said by FACT to be the last instance to date of a major new theatrical release being systematically pirated in the UK. Miscellaneous pirated material recently appearing under the counter was said to be of imported origin and often of derisorily inferior technical quality.

But there is no assumption that the skull and crossbones has been lowered in surrender, and there are more localised, but cumulatively far from inconsiderable, manifestations of the problem to deal with. There is the cottage industry of 'back to back' copying, so called because it operates by simple dint of two vers plugged into one TV set (4,000 cassettes of such origin were unearthed in the Isle of Man alone); and there are the 'mobiles', who effectively speaking are travelling salesmen, providing a service of pirate wares around factories, housing estates, etc, often in a quite extensive network of operations.

For all that domestic piracy has been reduced, it is still estimated to have accounted for something like 40 per cent of the 1983 UK market. (And the industry is already gearing up to the legal challenges of policing cable and satellite.) Mr David Rozalla, managing director of Warner Home Video, suggests that Warner's profits alone would last year have been higher by £10m but for the activities of the pirates. But he also injected a rueful reminder that things could be worse. In the us, where federal surveillance is active, the percentage rate is put at only 15; in Sweden it is a rockbottom 2 per cent. But in the Benelux countries it is reckoned to be as high as 70. And in certain South American territories, where piracy is considered to render the market inoperable, the pirates' share of the spoils is casually estimated at 99 per cent.

TIM PULLEINE

### Japanned

### Paris hosts a Japanese feast

Anyone coming to the Japanese cinema virtually for the first time should book a lengthy holiday in Paris during the next eighteen months and visit the Cinémathèque Française, which is running a 500-film retrospective arranged in three large blocks, tracing Japanese film history from the early 1920s to the 1980s. This great undertaking has required several years of preparation, with films coming from all over Japan, America and Europe plus some last minute discoveries tucked away in European archives. Coordinating the series from Paris is Hiroko Govaers, a long-term collaborator of Mrs Kawakita and, more recently, a distributor and producer (with Terayama). Fortunately for Londoners who cannot make the trip, much of the material up to the 1960s has been seen in various NFT seasons over the last ten years. Paris' large selection from Naruse's work will be shown complete at the NFT in

I visited the Season in its early stages in January, arriving just after the two 1920s Kinugasa films which are always shown (Crossways and A Page of Madness), but in time for four rare



Mr Peter Duffy of FACT consigning £70,000 worth of pirate video cassettes to the flames.

silents from 1928. Makino's version of The Loyal 47 Ronin was almost indecipherable, being in poor condition and incomplete and with what appeared to be another film stuck in the middle. Vagabond Gambler, by another veteran, Hiroshi Inagaki, and The Castle under the Wind and the Clouds, by the unknown Yamazaki, turned out to be handsome period pieces with startlingly mobile martial arts displays on beautiful locations and, in the latter case, some excessively flowery, pseudo-poetic intertitles.

The pick of the bunch was undoubtedly Tasaka's Town of Love, not for its story (a fairly melodramatic romance about a girl searching for her grandfather, now a blind factory owner, who finally secures a rapprochement between management and labour), but for its formal audacity. Tasaka's film, with its continually prowling camera and overhead dolly shots, makes even Murnau's Sunrise look almost static. In its starkly shot factory scenes, it also confirms that the Japanese embraced 'realist' concepts long before the Italians.

The fact that there is scarcely a scene in *Town of Love* without some kind of instinctive camera flair (plus lap dissolves), coupled with the few silent films we have seen by Kinugasa, Ozu, Mizoguchi, Naruse, Gosho and Uchida, seems to confirm that the Japanese silent cinema of the late 20s and early 30s was formally the most advanced and experimental in the world. It is one of the tragedies of film history that so few of the films are available to us now.

JOHN GILLETT

### Rotterdam

Jancsó, Potter, Ruiz

It's a curious festival that can make visiting film-makers like Henry Jaglom, Nicolas Roeg and John Sayles seem like commercial Hollywood directors. Devoted to the relatively unseeable and intractable independents across the globe whose work exists between the parentheses of an industry. Rotterdam has lasted for thirteen years, and under Hubert Bals' inspired direction has this year added a market to amplify its already hefty fare. For an American who can hardly keep up with a Ruiz, Duras, Garrel or Jancsó without crossing the Atlantic, it was like stumbling into a forbidden forest of plenty, loaded with potential traps and unexpected rewards.

Among the more solid achievements this year was a nine-hour TV series by Miklós Jancsó, intriguingly titled *Faustus Faustus Faustus*. Billed as 'excerpts, illustrations and variations' from



Liberté, la Nuit: Emmanuelle Riva, Maurice Garrel.

László Gyurkó's novel The Blessed Descent to Hell of Dr Faustus and covering nearly half a century of Hungarian political life (from the hero's birth in 1927 to his death in 1973), this sensual if sombre chronicle stuns first of all by being at once wholly Jancsó and wholly television, with no sense of compromise at either end.

Narrated by an offscreen Faustus who refers to the hero as 'my protégé', the series all but literalises the notion of caméra-stylo by floating from one detail to the next with the fluidity of writing. Mirrors, changes in lighting and focus and perpetual camera movements conspire to give the mise en scène a Wellesian rigour, with transitions between narration and dialogue and between background and foreground equally seamless and functional. One never regrets not seeing the images on a cinema screen, spectacular as they often are. Already subtitled in English, this masterwork seems a natural for the BBC, although one suspects that American TV is still too undeveloped to cope with its dimensions.

A good half-dozen festival selections centred on film-makers: documentaries on Bresson and Mankiewicz; a useful survey of black African cinema (Férid Boughedir's Caméra d'Afrique); Manoel De Oliveira's disappointingly lackadaisical Nice à propos de Jean Vigo; Jackie Raynal's cockeyed, cartoonish and semifictionalised account of her own American film career (with surrealist displacements) in Hotel New York; and Wim Wenders' querying of sixteen colleagues at

Cannes in 1982—from Godard and Antonioni to Herzog and Spielberg—in Room 666. If the latter two are real films and thefirst three more conventional audio-visual tools, Nice falters between these options, coming fully to life only when Vigo's silent footage takes over.

The presence in Rotterdam of Joseph Mankiewicz and two of his quirkier films (People Will Talk, The Honey Pot) added to the interest of Luc Béraud's All About Mankiewicz, two hours of talk without clips. It's in the second hour, when Mankiewicz is allowed free rein as a Hollywood raconteur (rather than begrudging auteur to Michel Ciment's Boswell) that his wit really shines. Room 666 adopts the minimalist strategy of planting each director in the same hotel room beside a TV set, alone, to respond to a pessimistic query from Wenders about the effacement of cinema by television. Whether by chance or design, the juxtapositions of silent video fare with directors-Godard with tennis, Fassbinder with cartoon cavemen, Antonioni with static—are delightfully apposite. For complex portraiture, however, Steve Dwoskin's Shadows from Light, about still photographer Bill Brandt, was the most dialectical exchange between film-maker and subject-a fascinating crossover whereby Dwoskin's camera movements somehow manage to translate themselves into Brandt's eerie forms of stasis.

If the new cinema needs to be outrageous, Sally Potter's BFI production *The Gold Diggers* grandly fulfils that requirement by forging a feminist sci-fi musical

extravaganza-with Babette Mangolte's most impressive black and white cinematography to date-which has no obvious British precedent, apart from Potter's own Thriller. Shown only in the Market, it has not yet found many defenders, yet its 'work on the image' alone deserves applause, and its ragtag anthology of avanttropes—ranging Richard Foreman's theatre work to Welles' The Trial (with odd near-echoes of The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T)-remains consistently fresh and unpredictable. As graceful co-stars, Colette Lafont and Julie Christie merge into the dense allegorical/alchemical tapestry with scarcely a ripple.

For powerfully framed visuals, The Gold Diggers was certainly rivalled by the paintbox pyrotechnics of Raúl Ruiz's splendid La Ville des Pirates—a breathtaking surrealist nightmare that crossbreeds Walt Disney and Gothic 1950s melodrama—and certain emotive closeups of Maurice Garrel and Emmanuelle Riva in Philippe Garrel's black and white Liberté, la Nuit, a noble if mannered attempt by Garrel to convert his brand of romantic poetry into haunted newsreel prose about childhood memories of France during the Algerian war, memorably assisted by a solo piano.

Seeing a double-system projection of a workprint of a poorly acted black and white feature shot with damaged stock is hardly anyone's idea of a jolly time. But if Ruiz's Point de Fuite-his seventh film in the past year-still carries a perverse fascination, this is partly because of the way it wears its shoddiness like a crown. Oscillating between half a dozen languages, mainly atonal English and monotonal French, it drives one slightly batty with its portentous gambling metaphor (poker games between three variously bandaged men), its seemingly irrelevant jazz drums on the soundtrack, and the capacity of each line reading to make the petulant dialogue (someone's exwife left the us 'because she couldn't stand the chicken there') sound even less likely than it reads.

Shot just after La Ville des Pirates, on the same Portuguese island, it reportedly arose in part out of a dare that Ruiz surpass Fassbinder's record of shooting seventy-odd camera set-ups nonstop; without bothering about retakes, Ruiz inched that record into the eighties. Cinema in spite of everything, because of everything: working worlds apart from Jancsó, Ruiz exhibits a comparable talent for renewal that ultimately enhances the bad work along with the brilliant. Like Godard during most of the 60s and Rivette during much of the 70s, he simply can do no wrong.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM



# Comfort and Joy

Glasgow locations for a serious comedy. Captions are by writer-director BILL FORSYTH



This film is a cross between Alice in Wonderland and Sullivan's Travels. The hero is Alan Bird (Bill Paterson), a very successful DJ on the local station, who at the age of 37 finds out that his life is trivial and empty and tries to do something to change it. It is a very serious film. Alan's whole life seems to be taken up by confectionery; sweets and cakes and between-meal snacks dominate his career as radio commercial voice-over man. So he decides to behave more seriously and stop a war.

Top: Bill Paterson. Centre: Paterson, lan McColl. Right: Bill Paterson, C. P. Grogan and others. Photos: Tom Hilton.



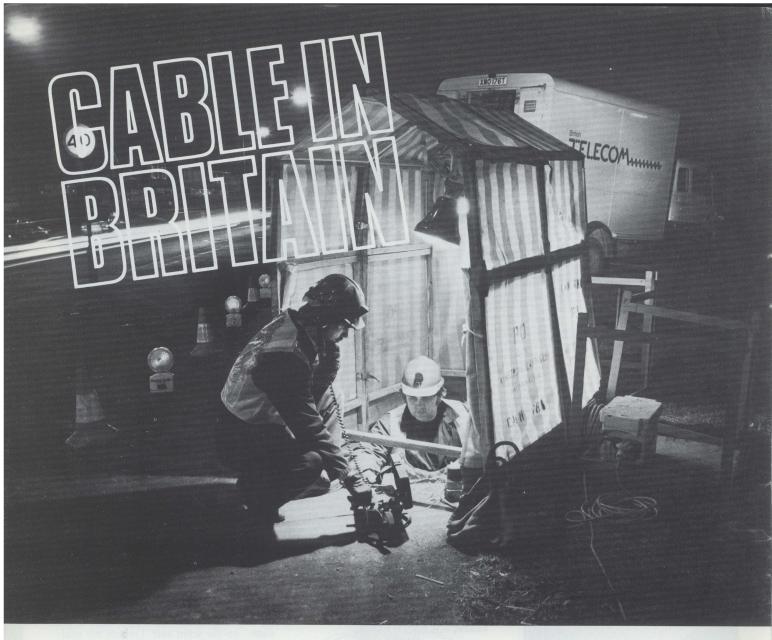






Alan Bird sits on the dockside and makes his first attempt at being a serious journalist. The ship in the background is the *Waverley*, the only working paddle-steamer left on the River Clyde, and an echo of a bygone age when the river was 'a high road to the ends of the earth,' as the script said. I realise the enormous risk that I am running by including such a romantic representation of Scotland in the film. Already I can hear my accusers declaring that I have fallen once more into the gaping trap that awaits every Scottish film-maker, the dreaded Tartanry and Kailyard. Or maybe I have strayed into a new and more terrible area of sin called 'Dockyard'. I await my sentence. The truth is that the *Waverley* was tied up for the winter and we couldn't move tit, honest. The metal bollard was extremely cold for Bill Paterson to sit on. It would be impossible to make films in Scotland without thermal underwear.

Mr. BUNNY



In thirty years time, we all know, everything will have changed. By then our broadcasting services will bear as much resemblance to those of today as the latter do to the pre-commercial television of the early 1950s. New programme production and distribution organisations will have become as established as the BBC and ITV companies are now, and new distribution methods, new ways of paying for television, new wall-size, touchsensitive television screens and new 'interactive' services offered through the medium of the TV set will all be commonplace. By then other major developments may be changing the situation yet again, with laser distribution of information and wholly personal, mobile communications systems supplying information and entertainment needs and completing the integration of broadcasting and telecommunications which has now begun.

Already there are one hundred and one different forecasts of the long term benefits to be won or the irreparable harm which will be done to our broadcasting and telecommunications services as a result of the coming of cable, satellites and the other new media technologies. Many believe that new horizons will be opened in broadcasting, extending individual freedom of choice and releasing

creative talents from the constraints imposed by the existing regulatory structure of television. Cable, in this view, will allow the communication of visual information at a more personal level,

# The first ten years

### **Timothy Hollins**

making possible a much greater degree of audience involvement in programmes received. New outlets will give an opportunity for quite different types of programme, including truly local community television, and will permit greater specialisation of content so that minority interests will be served much more fully than before. The result will be a service which meets the needs of all and from which all will gain. Looking beyond cable

as entertainment, its exponents see it as the vanguard of a technological revolution, the nervous system of an information-centred society and a significant instrument of economic revival and prosperity.

Others are less enthusiastic. To them cable, particularly privately financed as the present government intends and with relatively light regulatory controls, could turn out to be a Gordian knot which, if mismanaged in its unravelling, will destroy rather than create jobs, give little stimulus to our electronics industries, quickly become technically outmoded, pull down all that is good in our present broadcasting system and prove culturally damaging and socially divisive. In this view additional television channels will fatally fragment the audience and lead to an inevitable decline in programme standards. Competition both for audiences and for programmes will increase while the amount of money each television organisation has to spend on programming will fall. Foreign imported material and foreign influences upon homeproduced programmes will swamp our broadcast cultural identity and true originality and creativity will be lost. An increase in the number of channels will thus paradoxically weaken the domestic

production sector and result in reduced rather than greater programme choice.

It is easy to be futuristic about cable; almost as easy to be pessimistic. But just how quickly is one of these two scenarios likely to be realised? In twenty to thirty years time, certainly everything will have changed, but what about next year, or in five years time, or even 1994? It is all very well speculating and moralising in this way, but what most of us want to know is when we will be able to get cable and whether it will be worth it when we do—what, in other words, the go-ahead that has been given to cable will mean for us in the more immediate future.

### First eleven

Although there is already much activity by interested companies, progress in actually constructing cable systems is inevitably going to be slow. So far eleven franchises have been awarded for areas containing between 22,000 and 100,000 homes. In addition, a number of existing cable operators have been given permission to provide up to four new cable services on their old, limited capacity systems. Meanwhile many companies unsuccessful in the contest for interim franchises are waiting for the moment when they can reapply, probably after the Cable and Broadcasting Bill currently going through Parliament has received the royal assent this summer and the Cable Authority has been formally established. For them, however, it may well be early 1985 before they know if they have been successful in their applications, and possibly mid- to late 1985 before they can begin construction.

Already work has been started on converting existing systems to carry the new services, and those where conversion is likely to occur probably pass up to 3.5 million homes. This work should be completed by late 1984 or early 1985. Construction work has also begun in some of the new franchise areas, and one or two of the more optimistic companies in South Liverpool, Croydon, North Glasgow and Guildford are even predicting that services might be available to a small number of houses by the end of the year. In most cases, however, systems will not be activated before the spring or summer of 1985, and again only for a small proportion of homes in the franchise areas. Indeed this first phase of construction will not be complete until 1987, by which time the first eleven systems should have passed just over 900,000 houses.

By the end of 1985, therefore, new and modified cable systems should pass up to 4 million homes, rising to 4.5-5 million by late 1986. Thereafter systems franchised in the second round, mostly in the 1-200,000 home range, should be activated increasingly rapidly, adding perhaps a further 2 million households capable of receiving cable services by 1988. By 1990 many more systems will have been built, but should by then be encroaching into areas previously supplied by the older modified systems, which will be required to cease opera-

tions. Perhaps eight or nine million homes will have cable available, mostly on new systems. under favourable conditions, and assuming that early systems rapidly demonstrate their viability through high take-up by consumers, then building will presumably accelerate in the late 1980s. If so, one might hypothesise that by 1994 some 12-14 million households will be in cabled areas. This, however, is one of the most optimistic scenarios and, at ten years hence, very much a 'guesstimate'. By then, in any case, building activity will almost certainly be past its peak, as this would represent about 55-65 per cent of British households and include almost all which are classified as urban.

Homes passed is one thing, but those connected is quite another. In the United States average penetration—that is the proportion of homes in a cabled area which actually subscribe—is currently running at 55 per cent, although in many of the newest urban systems it is rather



Cable in hand. Photo: British Telecom.

lower. Few people expect take-up of cable in Britain to match these levels. This is because of the better reception standards for broadcast television here, the less intrusive advertising, higher satisfaction levels with existing programmes and the already high expenditure of viewers on the licence fee, TV set and VCR rental and videotape hire. Consequently, estimates by prospective cable operators themselves vary widely from 20 per cent to 35 per cent penetration in the first year, rising to 40-50 per cent after ten years, although a few do go above this. It is expected that between 50 per cent and 90 per cent of subscribers will also take a pay film service.

If cable is available to 5 million households by 1987, then an economic penetration of 35 per cent could translate into 1.75 million subscribers, with the majority taking a pay channel. A 40 per cent penetration of 8 million homes by 1990 would mean some 3.2 million subscribers, and a 50 per cent penetration 4 million. Our most favourable scenario for 1994 is for a 55 per cent penetration of 14 million homes, or 7.7 million subscribers. This represents a total penetration of British households of some 37 per cent. To achieve this, cable would have to show a

rate of growth and take-up where it is available as fast as that of colour television in the early 70s. But it would also be well to consider the development of the telephone system, which reached a similar 37 per cent national penetration only thirteen years ago, after over seventy-five years of existence and although available to over 95 per cent of the population.

In all probability, cable will fall somewhere between these two experiences. But even if it approaches colour TV's remarkable growth rate, it remains unlikely that more than 50 per cent of British households will have it available within ten years. Most of us can effectively forget about it, as far as connection is concerned, until 1990 and beyond. But in any case, for several years to come, relatively few of those who can and do subscribe will receive the full cornucopia that is promised. By the end of 1985 cable should have reached 4 million homes. Yet barely a seventh of these will be in new system areas. In 1987 perhaps 30 per cent will be on a new system, but only in 1988 and after is the proportion on older, limited capacity networks likely to drop below half. For the next five years or so, the cable which most subscribers will know will carry four extra channels only.

### **Piggybacking**

Expansion of service, of course, is relative. Small though an extra four channels is by comparison with what is promised for the future, it is still double what there was before. It is also important to distinguish between channels and services. Most of the early services planned are no more than 4-8 hours long each day; in some instances, therefore, it will be possible to 'piggyback' on one channel at least two services, put together by completely separate companies and transmitted at different times. In most cases these four channels will carry five main categories of programme, with one or two additional segments. One channel will be devoted entirely to a twelve-hour daily pay film service. The second will probably contain up to ten hours of sport. The third may carry both a 3-4 hour children's block and a pop-music service, with the fourth consisting of general entertainment programming and an additional element-perhaps a women's or lifestyle service. Variants might also include a late night four-hour culture service and a weekly local community programme.

Yet 'piggyback' services though they may, operators of older systems will nevertheless be unable to disguise the fact that there are still only four channels, showing a comparatively limited amount of material and generally relying upon extensive repeats. For anything more, subscribers will have to wait for the new cable systems. But even here size is relative. After all the hyperbole of the last two years, it is interesting to see the comparatively modest number of new entertainment services which most system operators are proposing to provide

Top: aerial at British Telecom's new earth station in the London docks.

Centre: diagram of switched cable TV system by Plessey Scientific-Atlanta.

Bottom: at the receiving end.

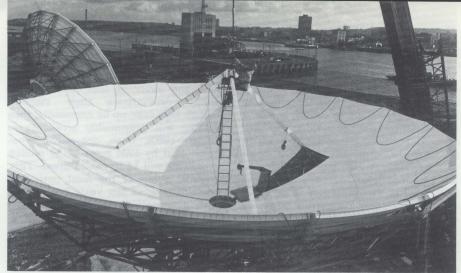
Photo: British Telecom.

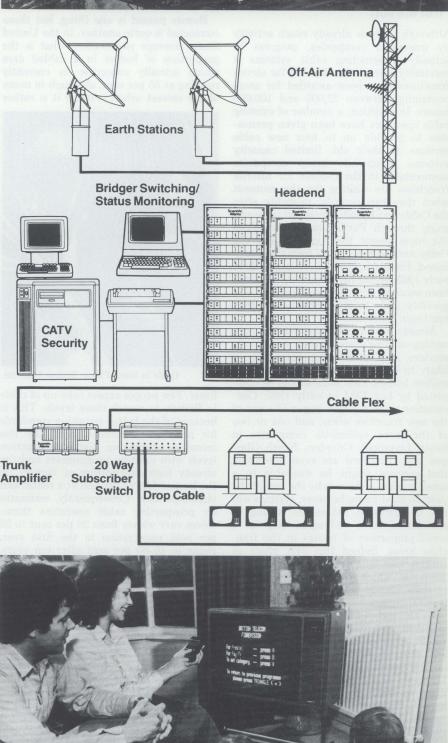
initially. None will be carrying 30 channels of programming for the foreseeable future, nor will any service be 24-hour from the outset, although several operators see both these as eventual objectives.

For a subscription of £5-9 a month, most new franchises are promising just twelve basic channels. Moreover four of these will simply carry the obligatory broadcast services, with one or two also being used to relay out-of-area ITV signals (or the two southern Irish channels in the case of Ulster Cablevision). In most cases another channel will be set aside solely for an alphanumeric television programme guide, and some operators are also planning a shopping/ advertising/classified advertising channel. All will be offering one or two community and access channels. although in Croydon, where basic service is to be seventeen channels, five or six are to be devoted to such uses. Few people, however, really expect even one such channel of this kind to be fully utilised for several years to come.

On a typical basic tier, therefore, there is likely to be space for only three or four new 'entertainment' services once these others have been provided. Again the standard line-up includes pop music, sports, light entertainment/general, children's and women's channels. Once again, some operators will piggyback additional, limited length blocks of cultural and ethnic programming (the latter perhaps only twice a week), while a few have also promised a news service, if it is provided nationally, and an 'educational' channel, although the latter is likely to consist largely of material produced or sponsored by industry and business. All services will be dependent on showing programmes several times to pad out their schedule, emphasising the extra freedom and convenience that such repeats give viewers.

Turning to the pay tiers, most operators initially will concentrate on marketing just one or perhaps two film channels, with the BBC and IBA licensed DBS services being added if and when they appear in 1987-8. Each will probably cost the subscriber some £7-8 extra each month, on top of basic. Few if any of the films shown, however, will be exclusive to one service, so that there will be little incentive for subscribers to take more than one. Early efforts will be relatively modest 12-hour services, relying once again most heavily on multiple showings of films that will be welcome to an audience which is already used to timeshifting programmes on their video recorders. Moreover, if the new Cable Authority interprets strictly the spirit of the Government's statements on taste and decency, there may be significant restrictions on the type of film which can be shown. Those which have proved most popular for home rental on video cassette-violent horror films and soft





pornography—may be effectively excluded from cable, or transmitted only in edited form. As with basic, it is evident that the first pay services will have a very general appeal, rather than being targeted on particular special interest groups, although one or two system operators are considering a more complex tiering and marketing strategy which essentially takes the music, sports, news and cultural channels out of the basic level of service and offers them on a pay basis, though at the low rate of £2–3 a month each.

Already it is evident that, as in the USA, most cable entertainment services will be nationally packaged and distributed to individual operators. The major multiple system operators (Rediffusion, Visionhire, Thorn-EMI) will take advantage of their early control of access to the audience (on their existing systems) to market the particular services in which they have an interest. A number of franchise applicants have declared their intention of putting together specialist standalone channels or of taking only elements of national services which they will repackage to suit their particular community. But in practice the cost and complexity of doing so, in the early years when all systems will be running at a loss, should prove a strong incentive to most to take nationally distributed feeds as they stand. The national service providers will in any case exert strong pressure upon operators to do so, not least by providing nationally oriented promotional literature and programme guides. Indeed the biggest problem is going to be a shortage of appropriate material, so that only the most local of programming will not be distributed generally and shown on several systems.

Inevitably, therefore, the entertainment channels being proposed by system operators reflect closely those on offer nationally. At present almost twenty national services are being planned by a variety of companies, yet competition means that they are of only eight or nine distinct types. Three premium film services are being developed (in addition to DBS), two music channels, two sports, two cultural and two general entertainment, one of which is already operating. In addition plans are under way for individual news, children's, leisure/do-it-yourself, 'educational' and ethnic services. Most who have declared themselves intend to be operational by the end of 1984 or early 1985, for although there will be few systems to carry them the industry needs a good range of services to attract even its first new subscribers.

### Prestel, Micro Net, Homelink...

Cable in its first years will be principally a carrier of entertainment programming. But it would be wrong to think that the interactive services which have been so much talked about will not also make an early appearance. Already there are hopeful signs, with several franchise holders committing themselves to switched star systems and to providing enhanced services of some kind within two or three

years of start-up. Even some of the older systems owned by Thorn-EMI will be offering a strictly one-way telesoftware channel, downloading video games and other computer programmes on to home terminals, no doubt on a pay basis.

Meanwhile several of the new systems, including Mersevside Cable, Rediffusion in Guildford and the upgraded Radio Rentals system in Swindon, will provide additional local teletext services. In Rediffusion's case this will almost certainly involve full channel teletext with a much larger page capacity and 'personal' pages which allow subscribers to enter data and requests and to receive private information, for example on their bank balances. With British Telecom keen to market Prestel and a video games service it is developing, it seems highly likely that most new systems will offer the former at an early date. Indeed Westminster Cable has already stated its intention to provide it as part of its basic tier, and others may follow suit.

With Prestel available, so too will be Micronet, the subsidiary videotext service for home computer owners, and Homelink, the home banking system developed by the Nottingham Building Society and the Royal Bank of Scotland. Moreover, three of the first franchises use BT's switched star system, so that its pay-per-view video library, of which BT has high hopes, should be running in these areas within five years. During this period, most if not all the interactive services which appear will do so very much on an experimental basis. But within ten years subscribers who do not have at least pay-per-view services, Prestel and some form of electronic banking available should be in the minority.

Many people are concerned not only with when cable will reach them and with what it will provide, but also with what it will do to our broadcast services. Undoubtedly it will challenge many of the basic assumptions upon which broadcasting policy is founded; it is right to be wary of the consequences. Audience fragmentation, the end of the duopoly, competition for advertising, new levels of American imports, the end of the idea that all services should be universally available and fewer obligations in terms of public services—all this must surely have major implications for the broadcasters of tomorrow. Nevertheless, one of the consequences of the relatively gradual development of cable which has been suggested above is that in one fundamental respect, audience erosion, the fears of a rapid deterioration in the broadcasters' situation may prove excessive.

Indeed, we can make our own estimates of the likely rate of audience erosion from the figures for cable system growth suggested earlier. If we estimate that 80 per cent of cabled homes take pay and that 85 per cent of subscribers (being heavy viewers) watch TV each evening, then by 1990 up to 2.7 million pay and 0.7 million basic cable homes will be watching television—pay, basic and broadcast channels—every night. This is out of a total estimated evening viewing audience of 14.5 million homes.

It is possible to break down the viewing habits of cable subscribers further, by adapting American figures for the relative audience shares of cable and broadcast channels to British circumstances. In 1982 pay cable services took some 19 per cent of the American primetime audience in homes which subscribed to them, with basic services taking a further 5 per cent in both pay and basic cable homes. Given the generally higher level of satisfaction with current broadcasting services in Britain, it seems reasonable to assume that the shares gained by UK pay cable channels will not exceed those in the USA—that is 19 per cent in subscribing homes. In Britain, however, those who subscribe to basic cable only will mostly do so specifically to receive the new basic services, rather than, as in the United States, to improve reception or to get access to independent broadcast stations. For this reason the basic services here might hope to get a higher primetime audience share than in the USAperhaps 10 per cent in pay homes and 15 per cent in basic.

### **Audience Share**

By 1990, therefore, about 900,000 cabled households would, on these estimates, be watching pay and basic cable services in primetime each evening. This means that out of a total national audience of 14.5 million only some 6.2 per cent would have been lost from the four broadcast services to cable. The BBC's loss would be no greater than that already suffered at the hands of Channel 4. ITV's loss might be apparent, but would yet hardly be sufficient to draw advertisers away or to reduce advertising rates, particularly since less than 3 per cent of that loss would be to basic, advertiser-supported services.

In 1990 it is most unlikely that cable will, by itself, have harmed existing broadcast channels to any significant degree. Even if a further one million homes take a DBS pay service via direct dish reception and watch in the same proportion as pay cable subscribers, the effect will be to reduce the evening broadcast audience share by only another 1 per cent. It is only when the relative shares are calculated for the 'most favourable' cable scenario for 1994 that audience loss begins to look less good, with a total primetime defection to cable services of 1.75 million households. This is equivalent to a 12 per cent share of the audience, of which 5 per cent would be to advertiser-supported basic services. This estimate incidentally agrees with a number of others, including one by Professor James Ring, a member of the Hunt Committee, who has suggested a combined cable/DBS audience share of 12 per cent

The ITV networks, reaching the entire country and gaining 90 per cent of the audience for commercial, advertiser-supported television, will continue to hold most of the advantages for national advertisers. Nor will they remain passive in the face of revenue loss when the growth of the new technologies also

means major new sources of income to be tapped. At present barely 2 per cent of ITV revenue comes from programme sales, yet as the demand for programming on cable increases, so broadcasting companies such as Thames and Granada with major production facilities and extensive archives will seek to exploit them. Some will also extend their programme packaging role and seek themselves to supply cable services. In any case ITV companies have in the past ten years paid an average 14 per cent of their revenue to the Exchequer levy, so that there could be a sizeable fall in income before ITV's profitability was damaged.

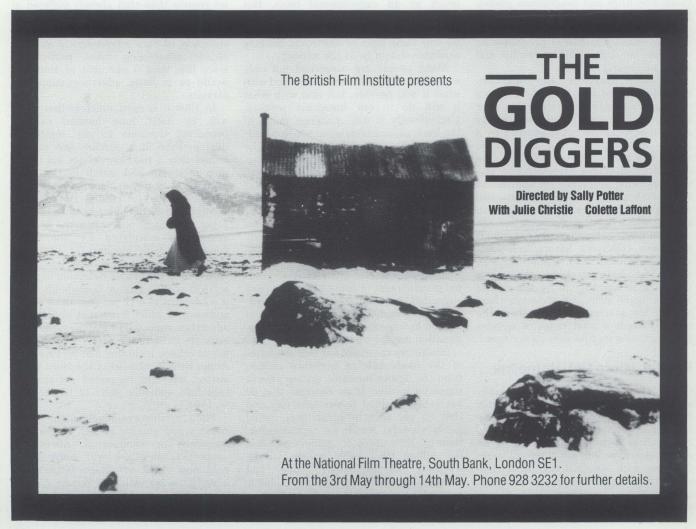
To the BBC, currently with an audience share for its two channels of between 45 and 50 per cent, the maximum fall by 1994 could be to the mid- to upper thirties. It has been suggested that it is at this point that its claim to be universally watched would begin to look dubious. Yet one of the features of a service offering varied programming is that its reach need not necessarily fall with its share. On the contrary, although the need to reach mass audiences is important, it is precisely in its programming policy of serving a wide span of minority tastes (often very large ones) that the BBC keeps its reach score high. In the last week of September 1983 ITV had a weekly share of 53 per cent compared to BBC1's 35 per cent. Yet the latter's reach was virtually the same as ITV's, at 79.5 per cent and 79.9 per cent respectively. The tendency for reach not to drop with share is supported by the experience of the American Public Broadcasting Service. There the fact that cable subscribers are heavy viewers but still fairly indiscriminate and prone to channel-hopping, has meant that although Public Broadcasting's share has fallen in cabled homes, its reach has actually risen.

Moreover, as with ITV, the BBC starts from a strong position, with enormous resources, vast experience in every aspect of television, national distribution, two channels to provide complementarity of service, vast programme archives and a largely appreciative audience well accustomed to turning to it for every kind of information, elucidation and entertainment. The Corporation has also shown itself ready to react positively to the threat from the new technologies, even if it has got itself in a muddle over its DBS plans. Looking at the next ten years, it does not seem likely that the BBC's position or its right to the national licence fee will be seriously threatened. Perhaps more of a danger would be if, as cable services matured and became themselves established features of the television scene, the audience mentally 'lost sight' of the BBC among the multitude of channels. In an era of competition which will breed similarity, the Corporation will have to work to retain a distinctive identity, a particular regard in the minds of viewers and a high profile.

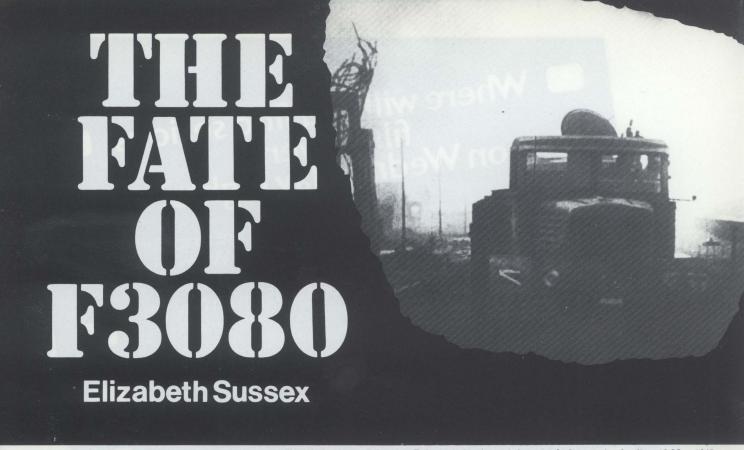
### Gradual revolution

The likely rate of system growth, the relatively modest beginnings for cable programming and the experimental nature of the first interactive services, mean that it will probably be 1990 or beyond before cable becomes a significant force in media terms. For the immediately foreseeable future, changes will probably be less dramatic than many expect. In the United States, with so much going for it, cable has encountered enormous difficulties, and it would be arrogant to suppose that Britain will be very different. Whatever the eventual shape of the industry, cable in its formative years will not mean thirty channels, 24-hour services, truly narrowcast programming, or widely available enhanced services.

To many it will mean nothing at all, since it will not be available; to others it will be another call upon their disposable income, having to prove itself in the competitive marketplace. It will for many years be a case of trial and error, technical problems, programming experiments, marketing mistakes and adaptation to circumstances. Cable has been described as revolutionary, and so it is. Like so many revolutions, however, its development will be altogether more gradual, piecemeal and prosaic than the word suggests. But then, in these respects it will be very much in the evolutionary tradition of British broadcasting.



### Where will you find serious film lovers on Wednesday nights? Naturally enough, serious film lovers like to spend most of their time at the cinema. But on Wednesday nights you'll want to get back from the box office in time to watch the box. 11.15pm on May 9th sees the return of 'Visions', six programmes in the most informative series on the big screen that you're likely to find on the small screen. Two Women Directors: Wendy Toye and Sally Potter A look at the work of two women who have made distinctive contributions to British cinema. The programme includes coverage of Sally Potter's new film 'Gold Diggers,' with Julie Christie. **Italy: The Image Business** Current goings-on in the Italian cinema, including an interview with Sergio Leone, who has just completed his first feature for 10 years, 'Once Upon Á Time In America'. A programme from the French series about the cinema, Cinema, Cinemas courtesy of a channel across the Channel. Cinema Shows in the US and USSR How does America's 'At The Movies' stand up against Russia's 'Kinopanorama'? Third World Cinema: Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Mozambique The state of the art in the African States. The Svankmajer Case A portrait of the Czech surrealist animator, Jan Svankmajer. Visions. Wednesdays II.15pm.



British Army truck leaving Belsen at the time of the camp's destruction by fire, 18 May 1945.

Much prominence has recently been given to an hour-long documentary about the German concentration camps which was made on the instructions of Sidney Bernstein in 1945, and never shown. An article in *The Times* (12 December 1983) by Lord Bernstein's biographer, Caroline Moorehead, and a transmission of an edited-down version of the film itself on Channel 4 News (20 December 1983) both presented it as primarily 'a missing Hitchcock'. The fact that the last of its six reels as well as two files relating to it were still missing, increased the hue and cry. The

Imperial War Museum was besieged with enquiries from all over the world, and Lord Bernstein was being asked by one of the heads of Reuters how to answer questions pouring in from Reuters staff everywhere in Europe.

In fact, the five reels were identified together with a typed commentary and shot-list in the IWM as long ago as 1980, although the negative is lost. Also Dai Vaughan, who viewed it in connection with his book on the work of film editor Stewart McAllister (published in November 1983), had seriously questioned, in the

light of the available evidence, how much Hitchcock could possibly have done on it. But in any event this was no ordinary production. The very care with which everything to do with it was filed away from the beginning under the number F 3080 suggests that it was always expected to make history.

This article is an attempt to get its story as nearly right as possible, and incorporates new evidence including interviews with Lord Bernstein and film editor Peter Tanner, who cut most of the last three reels.

The beginning of F 3080 was before the liberation of the concentration camps in Germany. All the relevant documents that can be located at the Public Record Office are in a single file labelled INF1/636, and the earliest is a memo dated 8 February 1945 and headed 'German Atrocities', from Sergei Nolbandov of the Ministry of Information films division to Sidney Bernstein, then films adviser to the MoI as well as chief of the film section in the Psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (Rear).

'We have now completed our enquiries,' Nolbandov reports, 'and have gone through all the Dope sheets of Russian material in addition to APS, War Office, RAF and newsreel material. The total footage is very considerable...' And this material, it emerges, was 'being collected with a view to preparing a film which will show the German atrocities committed in many parts of the world.' Financial authorisation to print it up was given on 26 February.

In April 1945 Bernstein went into Bel-

sen the first day after the Allied troops had entered it, an experience he will never forget. He almost immediately went into action. 'We had an army film unit there,' he said, 'and big graves were dug, and the skeletons were being bull-dozed in to clear the site because of disease and so on, and I thought this isn't good enough. I said the burgomaster and all the people in the nearest village had to come and watch all this happening so we could prove that they knew about it.'

In the PRO file is a copy of a letter dated 22 April from Bernstein to Paul Wyand of British Movietone News. This was written on the spot and confirms a discussion earlier the same evening to the effect that Bernstein asked Wyand to take sound interviews at once: 'The material is urgently required by the MOI who will accept financial responsibility for the hire of the van, your services, the film stock, etc for the period you are shooting at Belsen.'

By 30 April Bernstein had prepared a nine-page document headed 'Material Needed for Proposed Motion Picture on German Atrocities'. The film was to be a joint Anglo-American production for SHAEF, and it was proposed to make three separate versions, the first for showing to Germans in Germany, the second to German prisoners-of-war, and the third to 'audiences, perhaps specialised, in neutral, liberated and allied territories.' This document (one of several photocopied for me from Lord Bernstein's files) described the psychological warfare purposes of the film as follows:

- (a) By showing the German people specific crimes committed by the Nazis in their name, to arouse them against the National Socialist Party and to cause them to oppose its attempts to organise terrorist or guerrilla activity under Allied occupation.
- (b) By reminding the German people of their past acquiescence in the perpetration of such crimes, to make them aware that they cannot escape sharing the responsibility for them, and thus to promote German acceptance of the justice of Allied occupation measures.

The document went on to state that it was 'essential that the film should be factual and documented to the nth degree ... It will have to be assumed ... that in several years time the Nazis will either try to disprove the evidence or suggest that only a minority was responsible.'

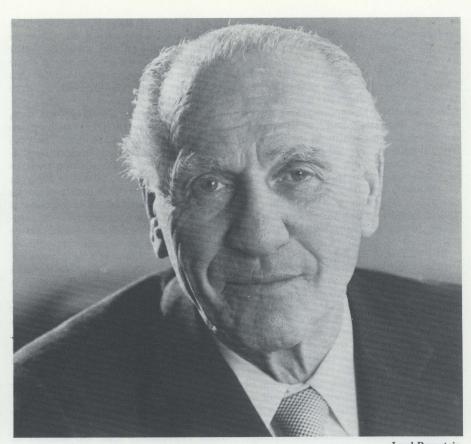
The main subjects to be covered were listed as: (a) Victims of German atrocities. (b) The criminals themselves. (c) Testimony given by witnesses and victims. (d) Physical conditions inside the camps, and their surroundings. (e) Reactions exhibited by German civilians when confronted with the evidence. Detailed notes instructed film units on the kind of material to shoot under each of these headings.

Meanwhile (in a memo of 21 April) Nolbandov asked George Archibald for an extension of financial authority for printing material from the original £100 to £250 (which was granted) and also mentioned: 'I have arranged that Messrs Marcel Cohen and Peter Tanner should work on this film, with every urgency.'

Peter Tanner made a diary note on Tuesday 8 May 1945 (V-E Day): 'Work goes on at Denham for the MOI ... I am now working on a film about the fire blitz on London in the History of the War series, also one on concentration camps—a not very pleasant subject.' Tanner worked out at Denham all the time he was with the MOI, and he has no recollection of Marcel Cohen. He seems likely to have been another editor, based possibly at the MOI itself, but the fact that Tanner has forgotten him suggests that he did not work extensively on this film.

Tanner started in the cutting rooms, very young, in 1935, and had editor's credits on B-quota features before the war. Just prior to this he had been lent out by the MOI to edit a Carol Reed documentary about the ATS which had a star-studded cast of British actresses but was shown only to the forces, also two David Lean documentaries about what happened after the fall of France, which had to be ready to show in France by D-Day. At the MOI he recollects mostly working on more than one film at a time and, although he has no record of what exactly he was doing between May and September, he knows that he was certainly not working on the concentration camp film non-stop. He has a vivid recollection of the atrocity material coming in:

'It used to come in the form of rushes



Lord Bernstein.

C 3086

directly from the camps, and I only wish I'd kept the continuity notes, because they were very, very explicit. The people, mostly Americans (this material was mostly from American units), couldn't resist putting in their personal feelings. Normally continuity notes are very matter-of-fact. But these were more than normal continuity sheets. They were really quite upsetting to read-almost as upsetting as the film. And I personally was ill, and I couldn't eat and sleep. It was really a terrible experience. But I felt it was certainly worthwhile to show it, and I think this applied to everybody.

The labs would not allow any young persons (possibly under 18, or it may have been 21) to have anything to do with looking at the film. They had very young girls working on the coding or numbering of the film, and they took them off. Even though they couldn't really see anything, they nevertheless put older people on to it. When we screened at Denham labs, the projectionists wouldn't look at the film, and if it went out of rack or was out of focus we had the greatest difficulty in getting them to do anything about it.

Continuing with the documentation, on 2 May Bernstein wrote to Lt Col W. A. Ulman at the London office of the us Army Pictorial Service confirming a conversation of the previous day: 'The preparation of the film is a matter of great urgency and I am therefore very grateful to you for agreeing to issue instructions to the effect that as from yesterday the APS will strike a separate lavender from the negative for the use of this production.' The War Office were supplying the same from their negative, he said, and all such material was to go to Nolbandov.

A Bernstein memo of 5 May said that the Director-General, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, had given his approval to the MOI making such a film, that production work would be carried out in conjunction with owi (Office of War Information, United

DRAFT OUTLINE FOR CONCENTRATION CAMPS FILM

It has been agreed that the atrocity film will be done on the following lines:

The opening sequence will consist of synchronized shots of Adolf Hitler from (1) Opening Sequence The shots it is proposed to use are of the 1934 Mazi party rally at Nuremberg, where Hitler made a declaration that it is the German film TRIUMPH OF THE WILL. not the State which made the Mazi party, but the Mazi party which made the State, - National Socialists and the best Mational Socialists States Government) and that, 'In the meantime, work is proceeding on collating and rough cutting the material already shot.'

In a further directive to film units (dated 7 May) Bernstein said: 'Cameramen should photograph any material which will show the connection between German industry and concentration camps—e.g. name plates on incinerators, gas chambers or other equipment, correspondence with contractors etc, in particular attempts should be made to establish the firm which built the camp ... the makers of the tattooing and/or branding machines used for numbering prisoners, the makers of the prisoners' clothes, if any.'

In a memo of 18 May Bernstein said that no decision was to be taken on the production of an English version of the film until the two separate versions for showing to the Germans had been completed. He also listed five 'action points' which included: 'Ascertain from OWI whether they wish this to be a joint venture and, if so, what contribution they can make in manpower... Secure a Director ... Ascertain which cutters can be loaned to us by Crown Film Unit or contracting companies working for the Ministry . . . Consider the engagement of a writer to collate information through PWD and prepare a rough commentary.'

On 25 May Sidney Gilliat wrote to Bernstein apologising for being unable to work on the production. In a long letter of the same date Davidson Taylor, chief of Film, Theater & Music Control Section at PWD SHAEF (Main)—that is, the American side of SHAEF-told him that experiments with a new atrocity booklet had shown that, 'Both nazi and anti-nazi prisoners of war dissociate themselves almost unanimously from any responsibility for the atrocities depicted. Furthermore, they say that many of the pictures remind them of photographs of the German victims of allied air raids ... It seems that the great danger in making any atrocity document for German consumption is not that the Germans will believe the atrocities were faked, but that they will steadfastly refuse to recognise that they have any responsibility for

1.

them. This is the thing I most fear in the atrocity film. I am sure it is a problem which worries you too ...' The letter ended, 'We are all very anxious to know when you expect the film to be done. Can you wire me a tentative immediately?'

Bernstein's reply (30 May) was that, 'No date, even tentatively, can be given for the completion of the film. The present production position is most unsatisfactory . . . For your information we have only received about 1,000 feet so far from the Dachau Camp. This does not get us very far. The material so far received is not in line with the directive; it completely lacks the factual, corroborative material which is so necessary. Unless the material still to reach us is considerably better it will be impossible to make a film of the type we both are agreed is required.'

In memos of 28 and 29 May Nolbandov had reported in enormous detail to Bernstein on the reasons why the actual editing of the film had apparently not yet started. The chief reason was that the US Army Pictorial Service had 'definitely refused to supply' the separate lavender as earlier agreed, but a trade union dispute was also holding up work at the laboratories. 'One should perhaps add,' wrote Nolbandov, 'that the amount of material is considerably greater than was at first anticipated. That the cutting of the film could not start until all the camps were covered; that most of the factual information dealing with the life in the camps is still insufficient and only now begins to come through—therefore we only now would be in a position to approach the cutting of the film intelligently whereas before we would have been working very largely in the dark.'

In a long letter (31 May) to Col Paley at PWD SHAEF (Main), Bernstein wrote: 'I am very worried about the slow rate of progress in the production of this film. To date they have 45,000 ft which must be less than half the total shot. Moreover, it does not include the complete report on any one camp, but consists of disconnected shots, so that it is impossible to start the cutter working on it yet. The chief cause of the delay has been the system under which MOI obtains the material from APS ... In addition, man-

power shortage and trade disputes are holding up work at the laboratories . . . A further difficulty is that we have not yet received any documentary or factual reports either from the Army Pictorial Service or from PWD officials who visited the camps . . . Lastly, I may add that the MOI made an informal request to OWI for some professional assistance but this they were unable to supply. I have therefore written Patterson making a specific request for assistance.'

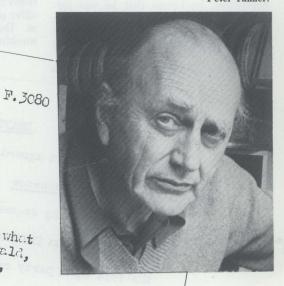
The first reference to Stewart McAllister is in a memo of 7 June to Nolbandov from Gordon Taylor, Intelligence Officer at PWD SHAEF (Rear): 'I am sending you the full text of the PID appendix on concentration camps including a rather full list of all the known camps as I think you and McAllister will want to digest this information right away.' On 9 June Nolbandov, confirming a conversation with Davidson Taylor and John Lefebre of FTM Control, PWD SHAEF (Rear), writes to Lefebre: 'What we are short of at the present moment is cutting room equipment and cutters. We would therefore very much like if you could obtain for us: (1) The loan of a fully equipped Moviola. (2) The services of an experienced cutter. We shall require these for a minimum of six to eight weeks. The cutter will work with Mr McAllister, who is the Editor in charge of the film.'

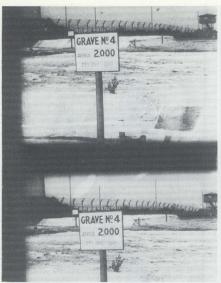
For more than two weeks thereafter, the hunt for an experienced cutter and a Moviola assumed astonishing importance in the exchanges between high-ranking officers of the Psychological Warfare Division of SHAEF. On 20 June Lefebre wrote to Gordon Taylor that they had got a Moviola, and also (through owi) the address of an assistant cutter, 'Miss Ethel Gambie'. But on 22 June Nolbandov wrote to Davidson Taylor: 'The owi very kindly put us in touch with a member of their staff (an ex-stenographer who has had about four months junior experience in a cutting room—joining etc) and we have engaged her. I am writing you this to put the position quite clear as you may be under the impression that own have provided us with a cutter . . . As far as the Moviola is concerned, Mr Lefebre has so far found us one which we can hire for £5 per week. We are investigating Peter Tanner.

PROPOSED LINE OF COLMENT RY FOR FILE ON CONCENTRATION CAMPS.

The film lasts one hour and is compiled from what coverage is available from Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald, Ebensee, Mauthausen, Ludwigslust, Ohrdruf, Leipzic,

It has been the intention wherever possible to be the picture tell its own story. consequent borne in mind that large langes throughout this corm





Grave sign at Belsen.

The last we hear of the Moviola and the cutter is in a memo of 27 June from Gordon Taylor to Lefebre to the effect that '£5 per week is considerably higher than the customary rate', that there is 'still no assistant cutter' and that the 'MOI is still anxious to obtain cutting room facilities.'

Meanwhile the names of possible directors have been cropping up. A cable from FTM Control, PWD SHAEF (Main) received by PWD SHAEF (Rear) on June 18 reads: STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT ATROCITY FILM CAN BE PRODUCED IN MUNICH STOP TRYING TO MAKE WILDER AVAILABLE STOP DO NOT DISCUSS THIS CONTEMPLATED CHANGE UNTIL WE GIVE YOU OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION.' An undated draft telegram from Nolbandov to Davidson Taylor reads: 'THANK YOU FOR SUGGESTION COLONEL AMBLER STOP APPROACHED HIM AT BEGINNING BUT UNABLE TO OBTAIN HIS SERVICE FROM WAR OFFICE STOP ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS.

It is not until we come to a letter of 9 July that we begin to understand something of what has been going on. In it William D. Patterson, chief of the films division of owi, tells Bernstein: 'Because of prior commitments, including joint activities, own is unable to provide either personnel or facilities for the full length atrocity film of which you wrote on May 24th. This film thus automatically becomes a MOI venture. We have prepared, as you know, a newsreel type compilation on the atrocity material which is being screened in Germany. We are also handling stories in the joint newsreel that may come along from time to time if they have news merit.'

So all that correspondence about the cutter and the Moviola was prompted presumably by an awareness that the American side of this initially Anglo-American production had never quite seemed to be pulling its weight. It would of course have been a great help to get a Moviola through American sources because such equipment was in desperately short supply in wartime Britain, but more than a Moviola was at stake.

'The Americans made a film which I never saw,' said Bernstein. 'I don't know what happened to it. I don't quite know who worked on it. You see, they did a

sort of *Desert Victory* too. They did it in Palm Springs or somewhere like that ... But that was a split then, in those days, and one of the things I was working on was trying to stop a split ... I never saw any of their material on the concentration camps except what their film units took—and they gave us copies of everything there, no trouble in that respect.'

From this point the papers in the PRO file begin to indicate clearly that a film is taking shape. All at once there is the evidence of a brilliant team at work, including definitely Colin Wills, Richard Crossman, Solly Zuckerman, Stewart McAllister and Alfred Hitchcock who, according to Donald Spoto's recent biography (page 285), came to London 'from late June to late July, to meet again with Sidney Bernstein'—and certainly these dates fit the known facts.

'I got Hitchcock over—he was a great friend of mine-because I wanted somebody to compile it together. There was a very good man called Tanner, and a number of good editors, but I wanted the imaginative touch that somebody like Hitchcock could give. He came over to edit it and give it some kind of extra thing besides straight documentary.' There is no question of Hitchcock ever having been present at any of the filming, so he worked from the material itself, and from what he was told about it. 'He outlined it, and planned it,' Bernstein said. 'He got permission for it from David O. Selznick for a limited time. I've forgotten whether it was four or six weeks.'

Bernstein explained that even in England there were people who saw the service film unit material and could hardly believe it was true. Hitchcock's contribution, he said, was 'The imaginative way he was going to show it to the German people . . . He took a circle round each concentration camp as it were on a

Alfred Hitchcock in the 1940s.



Food distribution

map, different villages, different places and the numbers of people—so they must have known about it ... Otherwise you could show a concentration camp, as you see them now, and it could be anywhere, miles away from humanity. He brought that into the film.'

It looks as if Colin Wills had been conferring with Hitchcock, and also with McAllister, for some time when he wrote to Sergei Nolbandov on 16 July: 'Herewith treatment and commentary for the Concentration Camp film ... So that Mr Hitchcock can get to work at once, seeing his time is so limited, I have been working on it without cease since my last conference with him. I think you will find that the haste has not affected the quality-I have concentrated on this rather than on detailed searching out of precise shots. This leaves the cutter a headache, but it was necessary to get the job done. I think my indications of shots and sequences will be clear enough to Mac, who knows the material so intimately. In any case they are only general suggestions.'

Financial authority for payments (of £50 each) to Wills, Crossman and Zuckerman was requested by Bernstein in a memo of 19 July in which he said that Hitchcock had 'been working on it since he arrived. He will not take a fee for his work.' He also wrote: 'The film, up to now, has, I understand, not been very costly. The main expense was the processing of film material. We have utilised as much as possible the staff and the facilities of the Ministry (Mr McAllister, the Ministry's hired cutting room at Endell Street, and a cutting room at the Ministry itself); the only additional expenditure has been the salaries of two junior assistants for Mr McAllister.'

I asked Lord Bernstein if McAllister was working on the film from the moment anything came in. 'I don't know if he was there at the moment anything came in,' he said, 'but he was one of the important editors that we knew and needed.'

'Mac was responsible for the Belsen material,' said Peter Tanner. 'I didn't want to show the same kind of things in my part of the film as he had in his. So I remember we quite often got together about that ... I recall him with great affection. He was one of the great documentary editors.' The Belsen material occupies the first three reels of the film, and it is interesting to notice in this

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Meanwhile back at the

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fed as quickly as possi

There had been no

context that Dai Vaughan's deductions about McAllister's contribution remain absolutely valid. The long sequence that Vaughan intuitively and most perceptively singled out for praise was undoubtedly the work of Mac.

Crossman delivered a treatment on 24 July, and a screening of *Triumph of the Will* (which is used at the beginning of the film) was arranged for him (and no doubt others) on the afternoon of 25 July. Letters of 28 July to Wills and Crossman confirm receipt of their outline and treatment respectively. There the Public Record Office file abruptly ends, but I have further documentation thanks to the papers photocopied for me from Lord Bernstein's files.

A fact sheet put out in mid-August shows that two editors are working on the film: Stewart McAllister with two assistants (Miss Ray Riley and Mrs Gambie) at the MOI and Endell Street, and Peter Tanner with one assistant (Donald Bowden) at Denham Laboratories. And a memo of 2 August to Bernstein from Nolbandov reports progress as follows:

'Belsen: Mac will complete the cut, and he and I are screening it on Tuesday at 11 o'clock. Peter Tanner is coming along to see it with us.

Dick Crossman is seeing Belsen on Thursday the 9th at 9.45; he has no time before that.

As soon as Dick Crossman starts on the commentary for Belsen, Mac will go on to the last section.

Dachau: Peter Tanner hopes to have Dachau rough cut ready next week, and will then proceed with Ebensee, Mauthausen and Buchenwald.

Maps: Gordon Taylor and I are getting together on the subject of maps, and will arrange an early meeting with Mr Larkins.

PID appear to be more than non-cooperative, and we shall therefore have to do the whole work ourselves—as usual.'

Tanner remembers Crossman, but not Colin Wills: 'I remember him [Crossman] coming to see certainly the rough cut and probably the final cut. My feeling was that he didn't seem very sensitive about the picture, but this may have been that he was hiding his emotions in some way. But I know he upset me by his attitude to it all.'

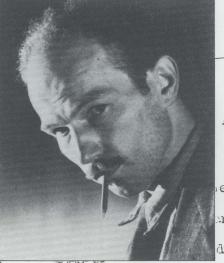
But the first memory that sprang into Tanner's mind was of meeting Hitchcock at Claridge's: 'He had a suite there and he paced up and down and talked about

it and had a lot of ideas as to what should be done. I have a feeling that it was just Hitch and myself. Somebody may have been there to introduce me, but I know it was just Hitch and I talking about it. He had quite a lot of ideas, some of which didn't materialise because he wasn't of course fully aware of what material was available.'

Tanner was unaware that Hitchcock had not personally directed any of the sequences and recollected certain shots as characteristically Hitch: 'One of his things was that we should try to prevent people thinking that any of this was faked, which of course none of it was ... So Hitch was very careful to try to get material which could not possibly be seen to be faked in any way, and one of the big shots I recall was when we had priests from various denominations who went to one of the camps. They had a Catholic priest. They had a Jewish rabbi. They had a German Lutheran and they had a protestant clergyman from England. And it was all shot in one shot so that you saw them coming along, going through the camp, and you saw from their point of view all that was going on. And it never cut. It was all in one shot. And this I know was one of Hitchcock's ideas, and it was very effective. There was no way for somebody seeing it that it could have been faked ...

When this material came in (it came I think to the MOI) we had a censor or SHAEF viewing, which was for the Americans. All the Allied people concerned would view this material and the censor would pass or not pass it. Now some material was not passed by the censor even for this film, which was considerably more explicit than the film that was put out to the public in Britain and America, and I do recall another of these shots which Hitchcock was so anxious to obtain in which (very fortuitously, it obviously just happened) a camera was set up in front of a tank (this was an American unit and I think it was Dachau) which came straight into this camp, and they were filming as it came in, and it smashed the gates right open and you really saw exactly what happened. There were hundreds of prisoners around and the prisoners attacked the guards, and one

Stewart McAllister.





Camp doctor Fritz Klein speaks to camera 24 April 1945. Taken from sound film shot by Paul Wyand of British Movietone News.

guard was stabbed in front of the camera ... Now the censor objected to the stabbing in front of the camera and that was omitted, and he also objected to a soldier kicking a German guard, which was very justifiable but was considered not correct. So these were two things I remember we had to take out, but there were probably other things ...

'As I say, it came as rushes, and I have no doubt that Hitchcock saw some of those, but I have a feeling that he had a commitment in America and therefore was unable to be present except at the beginning and as a consultant, and it was really as a consultant that I recall him. I think I personally had at least two meetings with him, and I have an idea that he did an assembly of some of the material.'

A draft outline (undated but presumably the one that Nolbandov mentioned enclosing with his memo of 2 August) seems likely to have been the last one approved by Hitchcock. It closely resembles the Belsen reels but differs considerably from the final structure after that. Much material had obviously not yet been received when it was written, notably coverage of the camps at Ludwigalust, Ohrdruf, Leipzig and Gardelegen, none of which is mentioned in it although all feature in the final film. 'We shall make an effort to increase the number of camps to ten if material is available,' it

Table of exhibits

31-

the skin was tanned and

elonged to two Polish and been receptured. did not core for the sight

and were assisted by ex-prisoners.

Lady faints

says. In fact eleven camps were finally shown. Apart from that, the outline places the Auschwitz and Maidenek material much earlier than in the final film, and also diverges from it in including a general sequence (prefaced by 'a commentary statement that the concentration camps were organised by the "Murder Gestapo as an enormous Trust"') which 'will show on the screen the methods of imprisonment, and of extermination, collecting the belongings of the dead and distributing them among bombed-out German people, exploitation of labour, grades of prisoners, etc, etc.

In a long memo of 22 August, Peter Tanner gives Bernstein his reaction to a 'script' (either this outline or a later version) sent to him by Bernstein on 14 August: 'The Belsen portion of the script seems to be more or less as Mac has it. At any rate I feel that his cutting is right, and that the script or commentary rather should conform to this, and be modified to fit this cut ... As regards my own portion of the film, I feel that some changes will have to be made. The material to be found on the various camps in no way represents the script here. It is all very nicely written, but I just do not have the material to cover most of it. Secondly, I do not feel that Mr Hitchcock's ideas on this part of the film will altogether come off.

'I think that we should begin, as he suggested, with Dachau, emphasising the large number of persons here, as this was a work camp, then go to Buchenwald, about a third less in footage showing slightly less people and iller persons and trying to avoid repetition as far as possible. Then follow on with Ebensee which contrasts the lovely scenery with the dving inmates of the camp. This should be followed by several others shorter in length and there should be less living persons in each camp until finally we come to the extermination camps of Maidenek and Auschwitz. These will have to be longer than the preceding camps and will probably be about four hundred feet each if not more.

'As you will see this does somewhat change the construction, but I think that this treatment will be quite effective. From the extermination camps we lead in to a sequence on loot. The clothes, private possessions of prisoners, and also the extraction of teeth fillings, cutting off of hair and so on. This can then continue as per script . . .'

The final construction of the film conforms closely to Tanner's suggestions, and the loot sequence seems to have been his idea. It simply stands to reason that a compilation film involving so much footage *must* owe a great deal to its editors unless the director is of the sort who never leaves the cutting room.

Nobody can remember when work on the film was completed, and I have found nothing to establish a date. The shot-list in the IWM is headed 'Concentration Camp Film scenes as assembled on 7th May, 1946'. But no conclusions can be drawn from that. Such a list could not have been compiled before the editing

was finished, but it could have been done any time later. My guess is that the date work actually stopped on the production had little significance in Bernstein's mind by comparison with the new problems that were besetting it, for early in August he had received a letter from D. McLachlan in the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office warning him informally of 'possible difficulties ahead':

My personal opinion is that we need a first-class documentary record of these atrocities and that we cannot be content with the rather crude and un-thoughtout newsreel so far shown. On the other hand, policy at the moment in Germany is entirely in the direction of encouraging, stimulating and interesting the Germans out of their apathy, and there are people around the C-in-C who will say "No atrocity film". I would say that the atrocity film, if really good and well documented, would be shown willingly and successfully in nine months' time when the difficulties of the winter have been tackled. There may therefore be no hurry for it, and rawstock and technical personnel could perhaps for the moment be spared from it for the needs which the C-in-C has stated as urgent and of which you have been informed.'

The two files that have apparently vanished from the PRO are referred to as 'F 3080/1 Processing of Material' and 'F 3080/2 Scripts etc' but the later correspondence was presumably there too. I asked Lord Bernstein what that was.

'Ah well, a lot of petulant complaints by me about what they were doing, and they weren't doing a lot of things I thought they should be doing. That goes for the military command and everything else ... My argument was make it, keep it and test it out in different German cinemas. You can't talk about apathy until you see the beginning of showing it and the effects of showing it,' he said, going on to recollect that his first big battle with the Foreign Office about the films to show abroad was over The Stars Look Down. 'I won the day eventually, but that took time ... I don't say I was right every time, but they were invariably wrong.'

But Bernstein lost the battle over F 3080. 'The military command just didn't want it,' he said.

Peter Tanner was able to produce two later facts. On 8 September 1945 he made a diary note that he was still working on the concentration camp film along with a couple of others including *Fires of London*, which was nearly finished. He also found a letter written to him by Bernstein on 30 September 1945, which said: 'I saw yesterday the section of the Concentration Camp film which you had edited, and hasten to send my thanks and congratulations for a most intelligent job. One day you will realise that it has been worthwhile.'

So Tanner must have been off the film by then, but he thinks he probably handed it over to Mac to finish. He also thinks a music score was composed for it: 'I'm almost certain that Constant Lambert wrote a special score. I seem to recall (because at the time I was extremely interested to meet him because I admired his work) that he came to Denham and saw the film, and he must have completed the score, I'm sure. And certainly we had a narration in English to work to, though who spoke it I don't recall, and then I presume that there was a German translation. In fact I'm almost sure that exists. I'm almost sure that it was dubbed.'

Tanner had not been thinking about this film for nearly forty years, of course, when I suddenly burst in on him with my questions and started recording his first moments of recall. When he realised that nobody else had ever heard of music or a dub, he began to wonder if it might have been Arnold Bax or possibly Arthur Bliss. And Lord Bernstein has no recollection of a score ever being discussed at all. He said that if they had chosen a composer, it could have been Constant Lambert because he did some work for them at the time and was a friend of his. However, he remembers nothing about it.

So there might be more than a missing reel and missing files to find. Or there might not. Meanwhile this uncompromising documentary (which I personally found almost impossible to take—we were spared much of the worst, I think, in the version shown on Channel 4) lives on in something like the opposite of silence. Its original purpose has gone, but its raison d'être has rather widened. Now, and for subsequent generations, everywhere, it bears appalling witness.

Sergeant Mike Lewis filming at Belsen, 24 April 1945.



'I wanted to make films only when I saw a bad one,' Ivor Montagu said. 'If they were good, I didn't care—I could go on and do something else. Something else: such as helping to found the Film Society, the film technicians' union, and both the English and International Table Tennis Federations; collecting small mammals in the world's odd corners for the British Museum's Natural History section; translating from Russian, German and French; serving as the Observer's first film critic (in the 20s) and a Daily Worker leader writer (in the 40s); racing from congress to congress and earning the Lenin Peace Prize (1959); co-writing Scott of the Antarctic; working with Eisenstein, Hitchcock and Squadron Leader the Marquess of Clydesdale, MP (otherwise known as Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, fourteenth Duke of Hamilton and Brandon).

Montagu has written elsewhere about Eisenstein and Hitchcock. But the Marquess of Clydesdale? This experience occurred on Wings Over Everest, a survey of the 1933 flying expedition financed by the flamboyantly patriotic Lady Houston (benefactor, too, of the 1931 Schneider Trophy Contest). The title lies tucked away in Montagu's filmography, but we ignore it at our peril (luckily the film has recently been restored by the National Film Archive). 'This was unique in the history of film and documentary,' its co-director recalled with a smile; the uniqueness, moreover, lay more in the explorers than in Everest. Film rights had been granted to Gaumont British with stiff conditions: every gesture, every word that Montagu re-staged in the studio had to match the authentic gesture and word used by Clydesdale (the chief pilot) and his doughty colleagues.

## Table Tennis over Everest

### **GEOFF BROWN**

## Ivor Montagu will be eighty on 23 April

The result, for Montagu, was 'the most perfect picture of the English governing class that has ever been seen.'

Catching their class image on film required Job's patience; once on the ground, the daredevils of the air proved wildly eccentric, fractious and stubborn. The Marquess himself was a stickler for detail with no sense of humour. He refused to point toward Everest with his right hand on the grounds that he'd actually pointed with his left (thus ruining an entire camera set-up). He also took against Montagu's notion of suggesting possible perils ahead with a tablecloth doodle of an aero-engine spiralling down to earth. Clydesdale snorted: 'The idea of failure never entered my head.'

But the film's prime peacock, Montagu

recalls, was Lady Houston herself-so bothered by her advancing years that she at first refused to appear ('My public thinks me young; can you make me young?'). The make-up man did his best, but on the appointed day illness forced Lady Houston to face the cameras lying in bed, complete with Union Jack counterpane and a tiara topped off with an emerald claimed by its wearer as the world's largest. Thus decorated, she spoke her piece: 'The people of India will know that we are not the decadents that their leaders make us out to be,' she declared to the camera. Montagu remembers trying to deflect her from fierce references to Gandhi, currently fasting and in danger of dying. 'He has high blood pressure,' she countered. 'It does him good to fast.' After Montagu laboriously matched his material with the local footage supervised by Geoffrey Barkas in India, the film was viewed by distributor C. M. Woolf and other Gaumont British bigwigs. They emerged laughing indecently; Montagu was taken off the project and the running time much reduced.

Montagu's anecdotes about Wings Over Everest not only illuminate one of British film history's daftest nooks; they also evoke a pervasive social attitude that bedevilled all film enthusiasts of the period. Clydesdale's mother, for instance, thought all cinema (and theatre) a falsehood, for everyone involved was living a lie. 'They despised films, film-makers and all intellectuals in general. Their image of the film-maker was rather like the journalist character in Shaw's Doctor's Dilemma' (a gauche individual described as 'belonging to an illiterate profession, with no qualifications, and no public register'). Montagu faced similar mental furniture when thrashing out Film

Daydreams unit on the beach at Rye, 1928. Left to right: Frank Wells (art director), Ivor Montagu, Eileen Hellstrom (Mrs Montagu), Renée de Vaux, Elsa Lanchester, Charles Laughton, Lionel Rich, Walter Wickelow.



Society presentations with the British Board of Film Censors. The elderly officers-variously afflicted with blindness, deafness and partial paralysis-performed their duties according to nobly outdated standards.

different brand of bureaucracy afflicted Montagu's Ministry of Information short Man-One Family, filmed at



Ivor Montagu (right) and M Sartoris. A return visit in 1979 to La Sarraz, scene of a famous 1929 Congress.

Ealing in November 1944. Montagu was trained in science, and here he aimed to smash Nazi race theories through a wealth of empirical detail. Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane, founder members of the Film Society, acted as advisers; and Huxley also wrote the commentary. 'I had a lot of trouble getting it right,' Montagu remembers; and the Government caused extra trouble in the months after shooting. A comic scene was shot featuring Edward Chapman sitting in a pub, arguing with Hitler over Mein Kampf. Whitehall's thumb turned downward; the scene was in bad taste. Hitler had just died, the argument went; it was not the time to tread on him with jokes. Export to Germany was then refused, though the film had always been intended for liberated Europe; a release of sorts was finally arranged in 1946. The difficult passage of Man-One Family seems to parallel Sidney Bernstein's projected documentary about the concentration camps. Both were projects conceived in the heat of war; both faced obstacles when the heat disappeared and policies edged toward reconciliation.

If Man—One Family reflects Montagu's scientific interests, Table Tennis Today undoubtedly demonstrates his main sporting passion (Montagu, indeed, was among those responsible for rescuing the sport from obscurity in the 20s). This esoteric short from 1928 turns out to be his first film as a director, pre-dating the three H. G. Wells comedies—Bluebottles, Daydreams and The Tonic-made the same year. Stars of the 1927 international championships were visiting Britain and enticed to the Islington studios. Montagu set up a table and rigged the cameras for slow-motion photography. Zoltan Mechlovits, the current world champion, 'penholder demonstrated his grip'. Others—Fred Perry among themshowed their own peculiar holds, spins and drives. There was also a parade of rackets throughout the ages. It all sounds splendid, though Montagu recalls that the ball rather let the side down-'most of the time it looked like two sausages tied together with string.'

The legacy of films expressing Montagu's political commitment is far larger. In pride of place we have Peace and Plenty (1939)—acrid, exhilarating agitprop made for the Communist Party of Great Britain; there are also the reportages snatched from the Spanish Civil War, made with Thorold Dickinson, Sidney Cole, Norman McLaren and others. Last year Montagu accompanied Defence of Madrid, Spanish ABC and Behind the Spanish Lines to Barcelona for a 'Film and History week' at the Catalonia Film Institute. This was Montagu's first visit to Spain for forty-five years; he found the experience deeply moving. 'It was wonderful seeing the films in the place where they had been born, seeing them with the younger generation, who were exploring and questioning their own history. Earlier, he told me, 'I'm against old age.' But witnessing one's own past coming alive for the present must surely count in its favour.



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# Glimpses of a Legend

KEVIN BROWNLOW

I magine it is 1930. The silent era has passed and you want to pay tribute to its greatest actress. Who would you choose? You would consider Garbo, but hers is a relatively new face. The actress you would have to select, an actress who has worked on the screen consistently since 1912, whose pictures include the cinema's greatest classics, is Lillian Gish. That such a tribute could still be staged in 1983 is astonishing. And those who were there, at the Thames Silents in the Dominion Theatre at the end of the London Film Festival, will remember it for the rest of their lives.

For Lillian Gish was not only by common consent the greatest actress of the silent era, she personified it. Her integrity and dedication are among the proudest aspects of the period. And there can be few actresses in film history with so many distinguished pictures to her credit: The Birth of a Nation, Intolerance, Hearts of the World, Broken Blossoms, Way Down East and Orphans of the Storm, all directed by the man she calls the Father of Film, David Wark Griffith. When she left Griffith and became an independent producer, she contributed further classics—The White Sister Romola—and while at MGM she made, with Victor Seastrom, The Scarlet Letter and The Wind.

Hers has always been the one voice to champion the cause of silent film and music, even when to articulate such an idea was to risk being thought senile. Besides which, Lillian Gish has associated herself energetically with the cause of film in the United States, from campaigning for Oscars for Henri Langlois (she succeeded) and Abel Gance (she failed) to helping to promote the reconstructed versions of Napoleon and A Star Is Born. And somehow she still finds time to act.

Thames Television's association with the silent era began with the Hollywood TV series. David Gill, director, Carl Davis, composer, and I had worked together on all thirteen programmes, and David and Carl wanted to celebrate transmission by staging a silent film in a West End theatre with live orchestra. They selected Broken Blossoms, but at the time no one at Thames thought it a good idea. So we had to wait until the new head of Thames, Bryan Cowgill, in an inspired moment, launched the first showing of the reconstructed Napoleon with orchestra. The success was unprecedented and David Gill has sustained the momentum, heading a small team which not only stages the films for the public but prepares them for Channel 4.

When we first put the idea of the tribute to Lillian Gish, she was as enthusiastic as we had hoped. She promised that she would be there, 'so long as my filming commitments permit.' Ideas tend to generate themselves, and the Cinémathèque Française decided to hold a Lillian Gish retrospective in Paris. Unhappily, Paris did not know of our plans, nor we of theirs, and they settled on early October, meaning Lillian Gish had to fly to Paris, return to New York, then fly back again at the end of Nov-

ember. She had only recently finished acting in *Hambone and Hillie*, in California. She had endured a very demanding schedule. We wondered how she would stand up to another.

### Saturday, 26 November 1983

The weather forecast was a litany of gale warnings. The Thames car hire people rang me to say the plane was due half an hour early; evidently the tailwinds were tremendous. A white Mercedes picked me up and whisked me to the airport. En route, the driver expressed great interest in Lillian Gish. He liked watching old films on TV. Had I seen a series called Hollywood? It had taught him that silent films were not accompanied by a piano, but in the big theatres by orchestras. I told him he could experience just such an event next weekend.

I scanned the crowd of passengers emerging from customs. One stopped me, recognising me from a Barbican show of Napoleon. He was an off-duty immigration officer. When he heard who I was waiting for, he reached into a shoulder bag, pulled out a camera, and joined us on our side of the railings. I saw an official pushing a wheelchair. Whoever it was, I told myself, it wouldn't be Lillian Gish. But then I recognised something about the colour of the clothes. My morale plummeted. I rushed up, and that most celebrated of faces emerged from the concealment of her hood and broke into a reassuring smile.

'We just thought a wheelchair was more sensible,' said her manager, James Frasher, following behind with a trolley piled high with suitcases. 'We expected a golf cart,' he whispered. 'Lillian said, "This'll scare them to death. They'll think I'm an invalid." 'As it happened, he added, she had twisted her ankle a day or so earlier, and he wanted to take all precautions.

'We read about the newspaper strike,' said Lillian Gish. 'Isn't it terrible?' I said. 'We've lost our publicity campaign.' And I showed her the magazines, which no one would see, of the Mail on Sunday—a big spread with photo—and the Sunday Times—a long article with a photo by Snowdon. Far from being dismayed, she took it as a challenge. 'We'll do lots of radio,' she said. 'We've plenty of time before Thursday.'

At the suite at the Savoy, a mass of flowers from admirers awaited Lillian Gish. 'I first came here in 1917,' she said, looking out at the view of the river. 'Our suite was just like this, and Mr Griffith held all our rehearsals here for Hearts of the World. We were here when the Germans bombed the obelisk [Cleopatra's Needle]. There was no warning-just a sudden bang. Mother was doing her hair. Dorothy and I ran down. We could hear the screaming, but they wouldn't let us out. They had hit a tram. I believe twelve people were killed.' She looked at the porters who had brought up the luggage. 'That was the First War. You don't even remember the Second!'

I showed her the printed programme for the Tribute. She seemed delighted with it. 'How is the music for *Broken Blossoms*?' 'It's the original Louis Gottschalk score,' I said, 'which Carl Davis has adapted.' 'Tell them not to forget the Chinese gongs,' she said. 'They are very important to the meaning of the picture.'

For someone who should have been suffering from jet lag, Lillian Gish was remarkably ebullient. She examined the press coverage which had escaped the strike, and James Frasher skittishly showed her an item illustrated by three pictures—two of her and one of the vast female impersonator Divine. 'I like this picture of you best,' he said. Lillian Gish looked at him reproachfully. 'Oh, Jim.' Then she examined it again. 'It looks as if I'd eaten a lot,' she said.

### Tuesday, 29 November

The television monitor in the Thames Silents office was tuned in to A-Plus, which was setting up in the studio. I saw Lillian Gish, dressed in a striking pink suit, taking her seat, and almost at once heard her directing the lighting. 'Camera high, light low,' she explained. She checked the result on a nearby monitor. One could see how the light flattened out the lines in her face and enhanced the expression in her eyes. 'Eyes are so important,' she told the cameraman. 'I believe that's why Dallas is such a success around the world...you can see their eyes so clearly. The story is just repetitive, but human beings love seeing themselves looking so attractive.'

Suddenly the cameraman zoomed in. Lillian Gish saw at once what he was doing. 'Don't come so close,' she warned. 'You could come close to this old face years ago, but now you can't.' They settled for what she wanted. 'Honestly,' said Mavis Nicholson, the presenter, 'you have the most remarkable face. Whatever was there is still there.' 'I was born this way,' said Lillian Gish, with a chuckle. 'I haven't changed. I've got white in my hair, but it's still a hundred different colours, you know—brown, black, white, blonde. It's still me.'

The opening of the show, which had been pre-recorded, was run. It ended with a scene from *The Wind*. Lillian Gish said, 'But to match that face sixty years later! I did my best this morning with make-up. But you can't perform miracles. You have to help it with lights.'

'Only a little,' said Mavis Nicholson.

'Oh, it's not for me—that's vanity—it's not to disappoint people who've seen me. They'd say, "Oh, how awful!"'

During the interview, Lillian Gish spoke about acting. She gestured at the lens. 'This camera teaches you what not to do. I used to hang a mirror on the side of the camera, because at first I was making faces. And then I found that you should start with the curtain down, your face in repose, and then whatever you had in your mind, you thought it and the camera got it. If you were caught acting, they didn't believe it.'

That evening, the *Guardian* lecture was held at the National Film Theatre. All the seats had been sold. Despite the cold,

a crowd hovered at the entrance. When Lillian Gish arrived, in a black fur coat and black cap, it was like a Hollywood premiere, with flashbulbs firing and even a man with an old-fashioned ciné camera trying vainly to get a steady shot of Lillian Gish as she was escorted through the foyer to the Green Room.

After a brief extract from Broken Blossoms, Sheridan Morley came on stage and introduced 'The first lady of the American cinema.' And he asked: 'Once you had settled in Hollywood in 1913, what were the films that first established you out there, that made you feel you were the beginnings of an industry?'

'We didn't know that,' she answered. 'We were too young. It was just something that we were working in to make a living until we were old enough to be accepted in the theatre as ingenues. At that time photography was so terrible that an old hag of eighteen was passé. She was a character woman. They had to have young faces. Once we went in to the studio, and there was an audience scene, and under the lights-those Cooper-Hewitt lights-they all looked as if they'd been dead for three weeks.

At the end of the evening, questions were invited from the audience. Someone asked if she had ever wanted to stop playing heroines. 'Oh, I'd have loved to have played a vamp,' she said to laughter from the audience. 'Seventy-five per cent of your work is done for you if you play a vamp. When you play those innocent little virgins, that's when you have to work hard.' There was more laughter. 'They're all right for five minutes, but after that you have to work to hold the interest. I always called them "ga-ga babies"

Her humour was direct, her vitality extraordinary. At the end, she received a standing ovation. Outside, the crush was so severe it was hard to reach the Green Room, and by the time I got there it was like Groucho Marx's cabin. Later, James Frasher organised a path through the crowd so that Lillian Gish could sign autographs. And then she was swept out through a barrage of flashbulbs to the white Mercedes, and as it drove away we all felt the cold again.

### Thursday, 1 December

Rehearsal this afternoon for Broken Blossoms at the Dominion. Contemporary reports of the film's premiere all referred to the elaborate Chinese decoration of the theatre. In particular, they described 'an unearthly mauve light'. Griffith discovered a lighting system by accident, when he projected the film with the theatre lights still burning from the prologue and saw the flattering effect on the screen. He used it extensively during the first run and later patented the device.

David Gill, in charge of staging these events, felt that we should pay lip service to the idea. Pat Downing, head of Thames Design, contrived a set of Chinese panels to fit either side of the screen, and a lighting display was organised by Lou Bottone to accompany the

overture. It was no more than a hint of Griffith's Grand Plan, but the print, from the collection of Raymond Rohauer, was lavishly and richly toned and any attempt to play light on the screen during projection would have been superfluous.

Lillian Gish dropped in for a few minutes during the rehearsal. As she arrived, the sequence on the screen—Cheng Huan discovering Lucy-was toned a rich brown. 'I don't like that sepia print they've sent,' she said. 'It was a black and white film.' I was flabbergasted. The print had been produced at colossal expense from a toned nitrate original. And even allowing for the print at the premiere being black and white, Griffith's lighting scheme would have added colour. 'My scenes were black and white, because I was meant to look pale and ill. The tinting makes me look sunburnt. Yet Broken Blossoms was renowned for its colour effects, so I confess I was bewildered, not to mention downcast. It did not bode well for the big show. 'By the way,' she added, as she was climbing into the white Mercedes, 'you won't forget the gongs, will you?"

We did not, but at rehearsal the gong had sounded like a saucepan. 'Where are we going to find a replacement?' asked Carl Davis. I suggested Chinatown-Gerrard Street, Soho-and Colin Matthews remembered a Chinese instrument shop at Cambridge Circus, so we raced out to find it. Through the door we saw an assistant playing an amber flute, just like Barthelmess in Broken Blossoms. We explained our predicament and were shown a gong which sounded superb. 'It's £1,000—you could hire it at £100 a day plus VAT.' We settled for a much cheaper version, and handed out free tickets for the evening show ... which was now

almost upon us.

At the Dominion, a flurry of excitement as silent star Bessie Love arrived, signing the statutory autographs and posing for pictures. She was followed by John Gielgud . . . Anna Neagle . . . Emlyn Williams, who had played the Barthelmess part in the 1934 remake of Broken Blossoms, and as it filled up the theatre (built in 1929) began to look more and more like a picture palace. Nevertheless, David and I were extremely apprehensive. How would the audience take to this strange, poetic fable from another age?

They laughed in places at An Unseen Enemy, the 1912 nickelodeon film, in which the Gish sisters made their debut. The atmosphere changed as soon as Lillian Gish herself appeared on stage to introduce the main film, and explain the background. (Luckily, she didn't refer to the tinting!) It was astonishing to see an actress on film in 1912, then to see her

walk on the stage in 1983.

A hush descended as the richly coloured lights played on the screen and the orchestra began to play the overture. I sat next to Lillian Gish. The atmosphere grew stronger, and on to the screen came the first shot of the gong. The musician spotted his cue too late. The gongs were mute. 'Where's the gong?' asked Lillian Gish. 'That's the essence of the meaning of the film.' I explained that the cue had been missed, but I recalled in acute embarrassment the number of times she had reminded us. Fortunately, at each of its later appearances, the gong was loud and clear. And Carl's adaptation of the original 1919 score, orchestrated by Dave Cullen, was surprisingly touching.

The experience of watching the film was transformed by the music (and, of course, the presence of a large and receptive audience). I had seen 16mm prints of dismal quality of Broken Blossoms, sometimes silent, sometimes with a piano, and the emotion had remained buried, like a flower beneath the snow. I had often wondered at the film's high reputation, and looked upon it myself somewhat patronisingly, as the cinematic equivalent of a Victorian sampler.

As soon as the music began, the picture took on a new life. The Gottschalk score was of no great merit in itself, but it was intelligent. It had been supervised by Griffith himself (who composed the 'White Blossom' theme for Lillian Gish). It thus belonged intrinsically to the film. The fusion of music and picture, like carbon arcs coming together, created an effect of extraordinary intensity. Gestures and expressions gained fresh significance; when Cheng Huan (Barthelmess) finds his home destroyed and Lucy gone, he cries out and collapses to the floor. Slightly risible when seen silent, this gesture gained great poignancy with the music. Even the performance of Donald Crisp, perhaps the most overacted villain in all silent films, assumed an operatic stature with the Wagner theme. As for Lillian Gish, her part seemed exceptional even when viewed under the worst film society conditions. Now her performance radiated the same electricity as it had in 1919, and it reduced many to tears. 'I have been going to the cinema for fifty years,' a man said to me in the foyer. 'This has been my greatest evening.'

### Saturday, 3 December

telephone call from James Frasher. Lillian Gish had hurt her ankle again and would not be able to introduce the last show of The Wind this evening. But she would try to be there for the end. This added suspense to the proceedings, and a sense of drama which, I must admit, was not unwelcome. (Fortunately, she the first seen performance vesterday.)

I remember seeing The Wind for the first time many years ago at the old NFT, and there were seven in the audience. This time, we had 1,362 and the house was nearly full. But as I said to David, how good a picture do we have to show, how great an actress do we have to bring over, and how long must she have worked in the cinema, before we fill the house? The BFI has over 30,000 members who profess an interest in the cinema-where are they when we need them? Foreigners put the British to shame on these occasions. Historian J. B. Kaufman had flown in from Kansas, a large group had come from Paris, including King Vidor's

daughter, and an actor from Napoleon, Harry-Krimer, who had seen Broken Blossoms sixty-four years ago, had travelled by Hovercraft from France.

The audience reaction was noticeably different from that to Broken Blossoms. The Wind, for all its bleakness, has a certain amount of comedy relief, and this received a lot more laughter than I anticipated. I suspected that some did not realise it was supposed to be funny; one or two people tittered at dramatic moments. Again, the music exercised its power. Soon, the laughter ceased altogether. The score, composed by Carl Davis himself, was of a more sophisticated order than the one for Broken Blossoms. So was the film. The story of a young girl from Virginia who comes to live on a cousin's ranch in a barren part of Texas was full of psychological nuance, and depended heavily on Lillian Gish's brilliant, deeply felt performance. But however effective the film might be seen silent—and there can be no doubt that it is effective—the addition of music provided far more than mere accompaniment. The girl's dilemma suddenly becomes much more vivid. One not only feels for her, one feels profound sympathy for the well-meaning clod of a cowboy she has been forced to marry. And one feels much more strongly the pressures of her new life, and the emotional tug of her memories of Virginia.

With the storm scene, the score reverted entirely to percussion, and a tornado seemed to batter the walls of the theatre, a sound so loud it was almost painful, dragging one, whether one liked it or not, into the same mental state as the girl—one seemed to be inside her head. This musique tempête climax, orchestrated by Colin and David Matthews, transformed the show into a happening. As the storm died away, and with it the pounding of the orchestra, one could hear the communal sigh of an audience which had apparently held its breath for more than half a reel. 'The most terrifying cinematic moment of 1983,' wrote Geoff Brown in The Times. 'No one could ask for a greater instance of the cinema's power to shake one's being.'

After taking several curtain calls, to tremendous applause, Carl Davis returned and announced, 'If you'll give us a few minutes, Miss Gish will be with us.' A very few minutes later, Lillian Gish stepped into the spotlight with scarcely a sign of a limp. She was greeted by a standing ovation. Like the trouper she has always been, she insisted on giving the audience full value. 'We worked out in the Mojave Desert, near Bakersfield, in temperatures which were seldom under 120°. I was the only woman in the troupe, except for the wife of the assistant, who was very large. So I had no double. I did all my own stunts, like falling off the horse. And there were eight [she actually said eighteen, but it was an emotional evening!] airplane engines to create even more wind than we had already and to blow sand at us, together with smoke pots which burned little holes in my dress, but luckily not in my eyes. Cold I can stand, but not heat, so The Wind was my most uncomfortable experience in pictures. I hope you enjoyed it, and let me say how wonderful I thought the orchestra was. The music

was 75 per cent of the excitement you have just experienced.' Later, at a reception, she toasted everyone who had a hand in the 1983 Thames Silents, and said 'May this be our unhappiest moment.'

The reactions to The Wind could not have been more positive—some people thought it even more powerful than Napoleon. We transmitted these reactions when we said farewell to Lillian Gish at the hotel. She and James Frasher were busy packing. She wore a white flowered dressing-gown, and her long blonde hair hung loose to the waist. The soft lights glowed on her skin and hair and I have never seen her look more beautiful. The rest of us were exhausted; she was suffering no obvious effects from a schedule which had included endless interviews and an appearance at every performance.

Over tea, she acknowledged that the tinted Broken Blossoms had looked better at the performance. 'You must have put more light behind it,' she said. But she insisted that it had originally been black and white. We left her in her suite, which was full of flowers and fan mail. 'When I get back to New York,' she said, 'I'm going to bed and I won't wake up until 1984. So when you think of me, think of me horizontal.

When we think of Lillian Gish from now on, the great actress will come second to the enchanting woman herself. She may have the stubbornness of a pioneer, but there is a quality one can only describe as sweetness which transcends any role she ever played.



### **DOUBLE TAKES**

### St Tanen

'You're in terrible trouble if you just make a good movie. Or even a great movie. With every project you have to ask yourself, is this a movie we can sell?' So said Ned Tanen, ex-boss of Universal, in an interview in the Winter issue of this magazine. And I'm sorry to say that he almost certainly hit the nail on the head. Those who love film, as opposed to the money to be made from it, are still full of illusions. One of these is that it is only the system of distribution and exhibition that prevents good movies from making money. Alas, very few really good movies ever make money these days. They might just enable their directors to get the chance to make bad movies which do.

I must say that I thought Tanen's salutary exercise in sophisticated commercial cynicism was also a little sad. It might appear to add weight to what most experienced directors say nowadays about the often faceless corporation men who run the major studios-they don't really care about films. Which you couldn't say about the old moguls, however ghastly they might sometimes have appeared to anyone of moderately creative bent. What was new about his painful remarks to Mike Bygrave was that they don't care because, as one factor in a conglomerate's operations, they either dare not care, or can't.

It is a poor lookout is the Gospel according to St Tanen, and seemed to be confirmed by the mostly pessimistic tone of the 'Cinemagoing in Britain' articles in the same issue. And it makes me wonder why any worthwhile films are contemplated for production. It just so happens that I have visited the sets of two such films in recent months—David Lean's A Passage to India and Pat O'Connor's Cal-and fear for both of them if St Tanen is right. The former is likely to be completed for something like \$16 million, thus having to make well over \$40 million to break even on current calculations. The latter will cost around £2 million and will have to take in the region of £5 million. However good they are, can either possibly do it?

Consider the Lean film. It is being made by a director who has not completed a picture for well over a decade, and who may not now be so formidable as he was when the likes of Lawrence of Arabia and Bridge on the River Kwai, let alone Dr Zhivago, made their millions. It has no bankable stars, except perhaps Alec Guinness (whom the Americans now regard as the third wonder of the world beside Olivier and Gielgud, after Star Wars). And it is an adaptation of E. M. Forster, about whom most Americans are likely to say 'who?'. If Lumet's Daniel, adapted from a novel much more widely known in America, hit the dust with a resounding thud, can we really expect Lean's film to hit the jackpot?



A Passage to India: David Lean, Peggy Ashcroft.

As for Cal, it labours under the fearful disadvantage of being more than partly concerned with the Irish troubles, it also has no stars and O'Connor, however promising, can hardly be said to have made his reputation yet in the film world. If Cal is relegated to the art-house circuit, it is financially doomed. If it isn't, could such a film, however revealing, do much more than make a name for its director? Presumably David Puttnam, its producer, thinks otherwise. But the risk involved in translating Bernard MacLaverty's novel to the screen must be considerable. Stuart Craig, the co-producer, says that word of mouth selling, after good reviews, is what he is after, admitting the wish of many audiences 'to sweep the Irish problem under the carpet'. 'If they identify strongly with the characters, strongly enough to be moved, then the reaction in favour might be more thorough than it would have been had there not been that barrier there in the first place,' he adds. I fear he may be pipe-dreaming.

This is not, of course, to rubbish either project before we see it. Indeed both A Passage to India and Cal, in their vastly different ways, must be two of the more interesting projects to be made this year British money substantially involved. My point is that both, and other similarly intriguing productions, have an exceedingly hard row to hoe in the present climate. Yet, somehow or other, they continue to get finance, which surely betokens an optimism of a sort. In a piece in the Guardian, Lean has said of A Passage to India: 'If it is a good story well told, people will surely want to see it.' If only it were as simple as that.

The truth is that unless something mad happens, like the worldwide success of *Flashdance*, for instance, those who finance films, and those who produce and

make them, can no longer bargain that they will get their money back if the work they do is satisfactory. These days you have to plan films, on and off the drawing board, like military campaigns. The marketing strategy is as important, and probably more so, as the product itself. In this way films have become no different from soap, toothpaste or a new brand of cigarette. And not just commercial pictures but art movies as well. Perhaps it has always been so, but surely never more than now.

I shan't easily forget Lizzie Borden's comment about her film Born In Flames, made for a tiny budget in New York and then very successfully hawked round the world's festivals in the effort to sell. 'Honestly,' she said, in a possibly unguarded moment after a series of interviews at the London Film Festival, 'I'm heartily sick and tired of the whole process. It's wonderful to be well received and to have so many people interested in something you've done. But sometimes I just wish I could get on and make another movie. I'm sick of this one. There isn't a single question about it that I haven't answered before, possibly dozens of times. There isn't a frame of the film I really want to see again. And all I've done is to ensure that I'm not flat broke going into the next project. You have to do so much for so little if you want to succeed at my end of the market. I'm not at all surprised that so many give up.'

Another director told me: 'I have now personally attended a dozen festivals in support of my film, and I thought it was at least going to allow me to see the world. But I just seem to move from cinema to cinema, and from hotel to hotel, meeting people I don't know, with whom I would undoubtedly get on better if I didn't have to spend my time selling either myself or my film. Sometimes I



Cal: Pat O'Connor, John Lynch, Helen Mirren.

wake up, jet-lagged to the hilt, and wonder which town I'm in and which country, and then why? All I actually want to do is make movies. But that takes about eight months in all. It takes two years to get finance for them, and then another year or so to sell them effectively. It's these periods I hate. But if I don't do it, I might as well forget what I really want to do. To be a director now, unless you are in the hands of a major company, you have to be financier, salesman and publicist too, and many good directors just can't do it, so they go commercial. And that means an even worse fate if they want to make anything in the least personal to them.'

### Film City

An English critic at the recent Bombay Filmotsav, pestered almost beyond endurance early in the morning by an Indian film director intent on getting a foreign reviewer to attend his latest opus, asked the director what it was about. 'It is about life and love, poverty and riches, singing and dancing,' said the director. 'And it is very good, sir, very good indeed.'

'Yes,' said the critic impatiently, 'but has it got subtitles? I wouldn't understand it without them.' There was a pause, before the director said: 'Maybe.' Fearing the consequences the next morning if he didn't go, the critic duly saw the film. It was exceedingly long, very bad and had no subtitles. Early the following morning, the critic received yet another call from the director. 'Did you like the film?' he asked anxiously. 'Maybe,' said the critic, slamming down the phone.

Indian festivals are a little like that. It is not always easy to achieve a perfect

understanding of the way things work until you are almost ready to go. A great deal of time is spent fending off the ridiculous in order to pursue the hopefully sublime. And waiting. Waiting for the festival bus to take you to the cinema; waiting for an interminable short about the Rugs of Rajasthan to cease before the main feature begins; waiting for the main feature to end after some two and a half hours; waiting for the bus to get you back to your hotel and waiting in the ice-cold lobby (Indians like air-conditioning as much as we like central heating) for the journalist to arrive who wants to interview you about British films; waiting for the almost always extraordinary result of such an interview in one of the local papers.

But they do have an atmosphere all their own which you slowly but surely come to cherish. It may be a different time scale and there may be a different way of looking at time itself. But the chaos is invariably friendly, the hospitality gracious if not downright intemperate and it takes a hard heart to leave without a sigh.

Most of all one misses those wonderful synopses: 'Memory and fantasy build a strange world—sad, mellow and distantly startling. The world thus built leads the characters to inevitability where, hidden behind an apparent betrayal, throbs an interior fidelity.' And, 'Saagara Sangamam means the confluence of rivers into the sea. So also any art: it is the confluence of various faculties. The true function of art is to edit nature and make it lovely. The artiste Balu is a sort of impassioned journalist blue-pencilling the bad spelling of God.'

And finally the press conferences. Ah, what bliss! 'Addressing a house-full, the director of West German film *Circle of Dacoit*, Wolker Showendroff, said he

thought film was based on a novel. Beeroot was flaming when film was shoot last year. Mr Wolker was bombed with political questions to clarify ideology but dipsomatically remained non-committed. Wife of Mr Volker, Margaret Trotter, said she has no taste for war films as her beautiful childhood was spoilt. She likes making real cinema. Both were garlanded.'

### Horizons

Putative cable operators in this country should watch Home Box Office, American cable's most powerful company, very carefully. HBO last year decided to go into feature films in a big way, with two movies a month in 1984, representing an average investment of four million dollars each. But it looks as if HBO is already thinking twice about the venture, since the critical response has not been altogether favourable even if subscribers are reported to be pleased.

The projects, though, look interesting-rather more so, in fact, than those mounted or being mounted by Channel 4, roughly analogous in their operation in this country as far as financing goes. The first was The Terry Fox Story, a docu-drama about the young cancer victim who walked across Canada to publicise the need for research funds. In production now is Jack Gold's Sakharov, with Jason Robards as Sakharov and Glenda Jackson as his second wife who is in exile with him. Other films include Between Friends, with Elizabeth Taylor and Carol Burnett, which is about two divorcées facing up to unmarried life again; and Right of Way, which has James Stewart and Bette Davis as a long-married couple who elect, like the Koestlers, to commit suicide together.

I'm not saying that any of these projects will be marvellous. But when you look at what Channel 4 has given us, albeit with less money to spend, the list does look instantly less ambitious. Perhaps David Rose, the senior commissioning man, should think bigger rather than smaller with his next series of C4-financed projects. And, if necessary, include foreign directors among those he encourages. HBO, for instance, is just completing a Chabrol film in Paris, based on a novel by Simone de Beauvoir. There's no really good reason why Rose should so slavishly stick to home talent, unless that talent provides him with the sort of product that will sell better than one or two Channel 4 films I could name.

THE DIKLER

In my last column, I awarded a special Dikler's Medal to Peter Howden, that indefatigable programmer of the old Electric Cinema, now the Electric Screen. Unfortunately, in an entirely unguarded moment, I called him Alan Howden. Long live his present reign at the Everyman, Hampstead. A great many cinemagoers owe him a great deal.

# TOTES A CONTRACT OF THE CONTR

### Some Questions of Soviet Television

### **TERRY DOYLE**

As I drove across Moscow on the all too familiar path to Soviet Television Centre, beckoned from afar by its skylinedominating transmitter, the taxi-driver was listening attentively to a production of Hamlet on the car radio, the sound of Shakespeare less diminished by the richness of Russian, perhaps, than by translation into any other language. Earlier, on the Metro, there were more people Gogol or Dostoevsky—or reading Galsworthy-than there were reading Pravda or Izvestiya: that, at least, hadn't changed since my last visit four years ago, or indeed since my first visit to the USSR in 1967. Art is a serious business in the Soviet Union. So is information. So, therefore, is television. As is well known, Lenin identified the cinema as 'for us the most important of the arts'; but then even he could not have foreseen the spread of television into over eighty million Soviet homes, to be watched by 89 per cent of the population.

Television and radio broadcasting in the Soviet Union is run by the State. The official title of the organisation makes no bones about this: The USSR State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, or, in shortspeak, Gosteleradio. This Committee is the equivalent of a Ministry, and its chairman is a member of the Soviet government. No pluralism, no competition, no advertising (at least in the commercial sense), no ratings game, no scheduling battles. Yet Soviet television and radio, rather like the BBC, is a major patron of the arts, supporting a total of over a hundred folk ensembles, choirs, variety groups and symphony orchestras. Its annual budget is upwards of 1.6 thousand million roubles (£1 = 1.2 roubles), of which 70 per cent goes into the complex technical business of reaching over 271 million people in 15 republics, speaking 45 languages, across the 11

time zones of one sixth of the Earth's surface. A colour television set is still a major investment for the average Soviet citizen, costing anything from 450 to 780 roubles (the average monthly wage is about 200 roubles), which is why the vast majority still view in black and white. There is, however, no licence fee to pay—the State takes care of that too.

The State Committee has done its audience research: most Soviet people regard television as a prime source of culture, 'acquainting them with the best works in Russian, Soviet and foreign literature, drama, theatre, music and cinema' (Soviet Television and Radio Broadcasting, Moscow 1983). It's the State also, of course, which decides what is 'best' for its citizens to consume, and no one is more conscious of this than a Soviet citizen. Even so, more than 85 per cent of a recent research poll regard television programmes as 'the main source of information on international subjects.' The report's conclusion that therefore 'most Soviet working people are well informed' is, however, rather more debatable. None the less, the power of the medium is not in question. As in the West, television accounts for most of most people's leisure time too.

So, when the statistics are digested, research conclusions simplified, and the rhetoric ignored, what do most Russians see when they switch on the box, and what do they make of it? These were among the questions I pursued recently during a brief visit to Moscow, Leningrad and the Republic of Estonia at the invitation of the Great Britain-USSR Association and its Soviet counterpart. As is frequently the case with such visits to the Soviet Union, official preparation seemed non-existent until my arrival, largely due to the apparent inability (or disinclination) of Soviet organisations to



communicate with each other. However, no sooner had the purpose of my presence become painfully clear to my Soviet hosts than last-minute meetings suddenly happened against all the odds, as did lengthy viewing sessions, impromptu park bench conversations and, just before I left, a TV set in my hotel room that actually worked. There were briefings from enthusiastic Heads of Department, disenchanted comments from young Estonians, and a privileged eleventh-hour encounter with the Acting Director-General of Gosteleradio, ex-Minister of Culture Vladimir Popov.

Popov agreed that if Lenin had known about television (the first regular transmissions began in 1931; seven years after his death), he would almost certainly have declared that it would outstrip even the cinema in its ability to reach the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of Soviet people—not just those of the Russian Federation, but the Tadzhiks, Kirghiz and Uzbeks of Central Asia; Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians in the North; Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaidjanis in the South.

For Popov there is no doubt that television is an art as well as being a central and primary tool in the 'distribution of information', otherwise known as propaganda. Interestingly, the word 'propaganda' is used freely in Russian without the pejorative, slanted, brainwashing connotation it has acquired in Englishespecially when used about the Soviet media. The same Western commentators rarely use the term in connection with Western media, which, it is assumed, strive naturally for 'balance', in, for example, news selection and comment. If the Western media tend to reflect consensus politics, goes the argument, and, with some noted exceptions, establishment values, then that is simply a reflection of democratic freedom, a million miles from propaganda or Orwellian manipulation . . . It is perhaps as well to reflect, in 1984 of all years, that, in Peter Ustinov's neat phrase in My Russia: 'The Russians do not have a monopoly of propaganda.' They do, however, freely admit that they are in the propaganda business-it seems to them both naive and hypocritical to pretend otherwise. In Estonian television what we would call the Current Affairs Department is called the Department of Propaganda.

Returning to the cinema, Popov was keen to stress that television must not be allowed to kill its sister art, either as an art form or as a means for the distribution of information, entertainment and propaganda. Feature films have to wait for two to three years after their theatrical distribution before being televised, and Gosteleradio has a separate outfit 'Ekran' ('Screen') within its ranks responsible for making films for television at the rate of 170-180 a year: documentaries, features, animated cartoons, stage productions and filmed concerts. Documentaries have a simultaneous broadcast/theatrical distribution not so different from the policy of Channel 4. In addition to the work of 'Ekran',



Soviet TV van outside the Olympic press building, Moscow.

Gosteleradio places orders for documentary and feature films with cinema studios throughout the country: these orders accounted for over a hundred features and forty documentaries in 1983. Finally, local studios in each of the republics produce films for transmission on Central Television, and Gosteleradio also enters into co-production with foreign television companies for both feature and documentary series. Film is by no means moribund in the Soviet Union.

Like his BBC and IBA counterparts, Popov feels that the most important characteristic of television is that it reaches directly into the home and to the family, still a firm cornerstone of Soviet society in spite of the all too apparent

October 1, 1931: First regular telecasting received in Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa

pressures of divorce, alcoholism, housing and consumer scarcity. Producers are therefore encouraged to be sensitive to the 'psychological climate' that exists between the maker and the receiver of programmes. This concern is reminiscent of regular responsible BBC and IBA guidelines about, for example, the portrayal of violence. The concomitant paternalism certainly shows on Soviet TV, in both the tone and content of programmes.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the most important programme on Soviet television, *Vremya (Time)*, the Soviet version of the *Nine O'Clock News* or *News at Ten*. Though, like its British opposite numbers, it occasionally changes its backdrop or its opening title sequence, Vremya has remained in the same format for years. Viewers in Britain with a suitable dish satellite receiver who tune into Vremya will, however, discover that it consists not merely of the dreary recitation, Pravda-like, of successful 5-year plan quota fulfilments, but generally also contains a far wider geographical spread of news reports than many British TV news bulletins, which may sometimes appear rather insular by comparison. Not surprisingly, much attention is given not only to world trouble spots but also to the achievements of what are called 'the fraternalist socialist countries'.

Questioned on the fundamental differences between Soviet and Western television, Popov outlined three main distinctions. First, the obvious one that Soviet TV is centralised, State controlled and that there is no commercial interest at stake. This is not always a good thing, he admitted, as people might work harder if money were involved. If this appeared to smack of heresy, he quickly deflected this implication with the conviction that, paradoxically, this non-commercial centralisation leads in his view precisely to independence rather than dependence on State control. By this he meant that, without the temptation to exploit the medium (and therefore the audience) for commercial profit or competition, producers and programme-makers were morally independent, though of course politically very dependent. Which is to be more highly valued, moral or political independence? There was no doubt in his mind, nor did he see a contradiction between being morally free but politically shackled.

The second major distinction is that the structure of Soviet television precisely and accurately reflects the political reality of the structure of Soviet society:

it is multi-cultural, multi-national and multi-linguistic (he did not add that it is monolithic and mono-party). The main Moscow Central Channel (Channel 1) may be beamed, via a complex network of cable and radio relay lines, repeaters, satellites and ground receiving stations, to each of the 15 republics of the USSR in Russian, but each republic also has a national channel (Channel 2) in its own national language. The power of the medium, in Popov's view, is that it can co-ordinate and reflect across the length and breadth of the Union the problems of the vast multi-national society which is the Soviet Union today: nation speaking, literally, unto nation—within a nation. Many Ukrainians, Georgians and Armenians would no doubt question whether this actually works in practice, and I was to encounter some flaws in the ideal while in Estonia. None the less, Popov was at pains to characterise the power of television not just as a means of distributing information but as a dynamic basis for the 'exchange of spiritual values'-not a common phrase in scheduling circles.

The third and final distinction of Soviet television lies, says Popov, in the aesthetic and moral standards of programmes. While he clearly felt that these were higher than standards in the West (he has a disconcerting tendency to lump all Western television under the same capitalist umbrella), Popov was also prepared to admit that programmes were frequently too strict in their moralising, and that as a whole Soviet television came across as too purist, too puritanical even. I met many Russians who would class this as a huge understatement. However, the bonus of this high moral stance was that children can watch any programme because there is no sex, no violence, no corruption—'a mirror of the principles of the State,' in Popov's words.

A Whitehouse paradise? Not for him the agonising of BBC and IBA moguls over 9 pm 'watersheds' for adult material. We did not discuss, however, the patronising perils of treating adults as children. The favourite programme of one of my official hosts was *Budilnik* (*Alarm Clock*), a popular children's programme. Peter Ustinov, again: 'My Russia is not a prison, but more a school, sometimes even a kindergarten. It is a place that seeks to impose discipline as schools do, and both the discipline and the schools continue into adult life.' He might have added 'and into television'.

So much for the official strengths of Soviet television. But surely the glaring weakness is that it only puts one point of view—that of the Soviet State. Popov: 'I haven't seen our point of view honestly reflected on British television!' He agreed, however, that sometimes the diet is monotonous, lacking in textural and substantial variety. A major ideological speech by the then Secretary of the Central Committee Chernenko in 1983, reprinted on the front page of *Pravda* (15 July 1983), underlined this criticism, adding that Soviet television was frequently 'too schematic, primitive, and



Telecentre sign, Moscow.

needed to be closer to life.' Popov admitted also the need to improve the technical side of programme-making, and the quality of television sets, especially colour, which most people still do not receive. (Following the agreement to mark the visit of President de Gaulle to the USSR in the 1960s, Soviet TV, like French TV, transmits on the SECAM system.)

The technical deficiencies of much of Soviet television were also borne out by my own viewing, which was divided between official screenings arranged for me at the Ostankino Telecentre and casual viewing in my hotel room—when I could find a set that worked. My personal impressions reflect the limitations of these viewings, though they also derive

### Central Television in Moscow operates on 11 Channels

from many hours of exposure to Soviet TV material while selecting excerpts for inclusion in Russian—language and people, some years ago. Too often, it seemed, variety programmes ('Bottom of the Pops'!) would consist simply of one singer after another badly miming songs to playback in front of huge tame audiences. Not once did I see a 'live' studio performance. In interviews or goup discussions camerawork was often distractingly restless and indecisive. Editing of documentaries was frequently erratic, adding to a seeming lack of direction in the content of programmes. Though the content was nearly always interesting, there was too often an apparently haphazard shifting from one subject to another, as if in the space of, say, one 50-minute programme one were sampling bits of Horizon, Everyman and Chronicle, with no logo or opening titles in between to tell you where you were.

Much of the drama I viewed was oldfashioned, theatrical and self-consciously 'dramatic', though the acting was invariably of the highest standard in spite of occasionally appearing rather stagy. The film biography, a popular Soviet TV genre, was too often characterised by a plethora of empty walking shots (the subjective camera rampant), selfconscious preening of the zoom lens, and superficial, unquestioning, banal commentaries. I saw Chekhov denuded in this way and was moved to write: 'There's something ineffably boring about empty films, especially when the emptiness is conveyed with insufferably self-conscious lyricism.' Certainly there's a limit to how much one can take shots of the travelling sun glinting behind swaying birch trees, riderless horses cantering through empty streets, across empty fields, and faded lace curtains fluttering in the breeze as an empty room reveals the writer's pen lying meaningfully inert on the vacated desk. This is where Chekhov wrote Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya, The Cherry Orchard, and this is the pen he wrote them with. But perhaps this is merely the tired perception of a satiated Western viewer no longer able to appreciate genuine naivety and reverent romanticism.

A portrait of Dostoevsky receives similar 'gloom and zoom' treatment. Like a Dostoevsky hero, the camera is never still—it zooms, it pans, it swerves, focuses, defocuses, refocuses; it travels, walks, cranes, reveals, conceals, wavers, wavers again and slides. The result is a series of giddy and melodramatic manoeuvres in search of meaning amid dusty manuscripts and the Women in His Life. Doors open mysteriously into, yes, empty rooms, and so often there's nothing at the end of the zoom.

Somehow, too, the sound on Soviet television is rarely 'real'. This has a peculiar distancing effect almost inviting disbelief. One prays for synch sound, live interview, real effects, but too often has to be content with disembodied (patronising) voice-over, dubbed voices over dialogue, artificial effects or, more likely, pervasive background music irrespective of any intent to create mood or atmosphere-a wall to wall musical carpet, wallpaper over the cracks of creaking commentary. I often felt that the effect of Soviet TV could be transformed if more attention were paid to live sound. I felt sure, too, that the best of Soviet television transcends such technical and artistic limitations, which are particularly evident, ironically, when foreigners are shown what, it is thought, is 'best' for them to see.

Drama on Soviet television seems to consist mainly of mere televised reproductions of theatrical performances, especially costume drama, badly dubbed. Repeated requests to be shown contemporary drama about current Soviet daily life were never met, though I was assured they existed. The nearest I got to such a genre was a two-handed comedy by Arbuzov set in the 1960s, the action confined to the studio, never out on to the streets. Though, according to the official Soviet TV brochure, I could, as a result of the

stipulation of the Helsinki agreements to exchange cultural values, have watched realistic foreign imports such as Danger—Slippery Ice (Federal Republic of Germany) and Cathy—Go Home (sic—Great Britain). Most foreign imports are from socialist countries.

My impressions were confirmed in an article by Leningrad literary critic T. Marchenko in Pravda (27 July 1983) bemoaning the lack of contemporary relevance in 'teletheatre', which seems for the most part to be content to produce 'readings' or adaptations of the classics, rather than create afresh. This is to neglect, he argues, the real power of drama: its inner psychological authenticity and its 'publicist' potential. Quoting, as exceptions to the run of Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Maupassant adaptations, plays by the American writer M. Anderson (Gentlemen of Congress), and another based on a viewer's letter, Marchenko goes on to cite Leningrad TV's consistent attempts to reach out into reality by, for example, involving Kirov metal factory workers in a production of an Avdeenko short story. In general, however, he criticises the almost complete absence of contemporary relevant

Socio-political programmes take up 6% of air time. Most popular series: 'The Leninist University of Millions'; 'Rural Hour'; 'I serve the Soviet Union'

TV drama, calling this state of affairs 'incomprehensible'. Incomprehensible, but not inevitable: what it needs are, he argues, fearless writers, directors and actors who are both willing and able to tackle 'the painful aspects of contemporary life' honestly. Only then will the inherent documentary and publicist strengths of the medium be used to their artistic full. Seeing will be believing.

One department of Soviet television that does seem firmly rooted in reality is the Department of Youth (not Children's) programmes, where I saw some excellent, technically brilliant, witty, relevant and educative programmes. The avowed aim of this department is to 'help foster in the younger generation a devotion to communist ideals, love for the country, determine their place in life, describe the glorious labour deeds of the Soviet people, develop the youth's work habits, encourage love for nature, and foster their liking for literature, art and sports.' It's reassuring that good programmes can survive such a brief, in spite of such uninspired titles as: You Can Do It, We Are Building BAM (the Baikal-Amur Magistral, in Siberia), What? Where? When? and Jolly Playmates.

The basic aim of children's programmes, I was told in Leningrad, was, unashamedly, 'to form tastes'. It was in Leningrad too that I heard reiterated

part of the answer to the apparent dearth of plays about sovremennost (contemporary life): the difficulty of finding good writers who can write for television about sovremennost. This lament is of course not unheard of in British TV script editing circles, much to the chagrin of good unrecognised authors. In both cases the system must share some of the blame. The result in the Soviet Union—as noted above—is that the tendency is to adapt existing, published plays, though contemporary playwrights such as Volodyin, Arbuzov, Gelman, Dvoretsky and Zlotnikov have been commissioned to write specially for television. In Leningrad also I was told that consumer programming and even some consumer advertising does exist on Soviet television-though the function of consumer advertising is totally the opposite to that in the West: the aim, it was put to me, was not to create demand for unnecessary goods, but to increase the production of goods in short supply (defitsitnyi). As one cynic put it, however, the really good products don't need advertising-they're sold out long before television finds out about

According to an official Estonian handout, 'the most remarkable achievement of the Estonian television so far is Valdo Pant's serial Today 25 Years Ago about World War II that ran into 313 parts in four years.' In spite of this, the Estonian chapter of my visit was in some ways the most interesting. Here, in this tiny Baltic republic sandwiched between East and West, having far more in common culturally with, say, Finland than with Russia, television, with a regular audience of less than a million, plays a key role as the defender of national identity-the first programme I was proudly shown was a film of the fiveyearly Estonian song festival, culminating in an emotional mass rendering of the Estonian National Song, a kind of fusion of 'Rule Britannia' and 'Abide With Me'.

We send films abroad to show people we exist,' I was told by the Chairman of Estonian TV Enn Anupõld. His wish was to develop educational television, particularly adult education, at least partly in order to maintain Estonian cultural identity-at present all educational material derives from Moscow. Officials will bemoan the negative influence of Western culture (via Finnish Television, freely available in Estonia) with its insistence on materialist values. But ask young Estonians their favourite TV programme and they will reply: The Benny Hill Show and The Muppets (both currently showing on Finnish TV). Anupõld also gave a clue to the commentary-laden nature of many documentaries when he said: 'Everything depends on good journalists. Give me five good young journalists and I'll be happy.'

Finnish television is liked by Estonians because it is more critical, more 'non-party', and because it has more Western TV programmes than Soviet television. As one Estonian writer told me, 'There's not enough film of Western daily life on Soviet television—too much politics, not



Teletower, Moscow.

enough daily life.' This echoed strangely but accurately the theme of many letters I had received following my series Russian-language and people for BBC TV, bemoaning the general lack of film about Russian daily life on British television. This same writer felt passionately that film and television should be the basis for a dialogue between East and West, instead of 'fuelling the propaganda war'. The truth is more complex than the black and white picture that too often colours our screens, he felt, the one asserting that there is no democracy in the Soviet Union, the other claiming that the West is founded entirely on materialism, violence and corruption. But there's a financial Catch-22 about this situation,

Audiences for Channel 1 are nationwide and amount to more than 240 million, or 89% of the Soviet population

the *valyuta* (foreign exchange) catch: for the Soviets to buy in Western television programmes they need hard foreign currency which can only be obtained if the West buys Soviet television programmes.

Whereas most Soviet television tends to take itself a shade too seriously (a vice which, you might say, is not restricted to the USSR), I saw some quite witty, humorous and technically excellent programmes in Estonia. This led me to question whether there is indeed such a thing as

'Soviet' television. Perhaps each républic retains a different style, resisting cultural imperialism from Moscow. I did not see enough to know, but certainly the editing and direction of, for example, the wildlife films produced at Estonian Television were crisp and sharp. The best of these, a poignant 30-minute documentary by Rein Moran called *Zhuravli* (*The Cranes*), highlighted the dilemma of judging Soviet television (or indeed cinema and literature) from a purely Western standpoint, adopting criteria which may not seem relevant to a Russian.

On one level the film is in classic World About Us vein: a film about ecology, about the problem of the imminent extinction of the cranes. But in Eastern culture the crane is also a symbol of immortality, and in the film becomes a Zen-like symbol of the spirit and hope of man faced with the limitations of his own ecology. The natural symbolic ending to the film was a beautiful long still shot of white cotton fields, white representing death in Eastern iconography. Any Western editor/director would have ended the film here and run the end credits. But, I was told, 'It would have been too pessimistic to finish the film at this point.' The film continued, therefore, with positive information about the possibility of survival through reformed feeding habits. Sometimes, the ever-present optimism of Soviet television seems, to a Western observer, one of its most intolerable

characteristics. Nevertheless, this was still a remarkable film by any standards.

Official screenings and interviews aside, insights into Soviet reality, television included, are as, if not more, likely to come from chance encounters, chance remarks: the Novosti (APN) Press representative in Tallinn who, when asked whether there was any television criticism in the Soviet press, answered: 'The viewers are educated enough already. Their critical faculties are developed by having so many channels to watch.' Or

## One minute of advertising time on Estonian television costs 12 roubles

the pretty blonde Estonian typist on sex: 'We want sex to be reflected in our media, but they pretend it doesn't exist.' Or the visit to a kindergarten on an Estonian collective farm, where the one television set was, as so many things in the Soviet Union seem perpetually to be, na remont (being repaired); the 12-year-old Estonian girl, whose favourite programme, unswervingly and unhesitatingly, was Tom and Jerry (courtesy of Finnish TV, of course); the young Estonian kolkhoz worker who didn't speak enough Russian to watch the Moscow channel, who was therefore immune to Russian propa-

ganda, and whose favourite programme (he was a tractor mechanic) was 'agricultural documentaries'; my rather stern (though unfailingly helpful) Estonian guide who, over a friendly lethal cocktail, disclosed: 'There's not enough laughter on our TV. People need to laugh. That's why they watch Benny Hill.'

But the most interesting meetings are the spontaneous ones, on the boulevards, on park benches: on just such a park bench in the beautiful Theatrical Square in Leningrad, beneath the statue of Pushkin, a conversation with two young football supporters which started with the unlikely question: 'Excuse me, have you heard of Ipswich Town? A friend of ours plays for them!' continued with the plea: 'Tell us the truth—we're fed up to here with the propaganda on television-every day the same thing-politics, politics, politics. If only they would show us entertainment from the West, how people really live, at least that would be a balanced output.' They knew I was not Russian by the quality of my jeans, they said, and because I was reading a Western book. The book was Peter Ustinov's My Russia. I didn't tell them the purpose of my visit.

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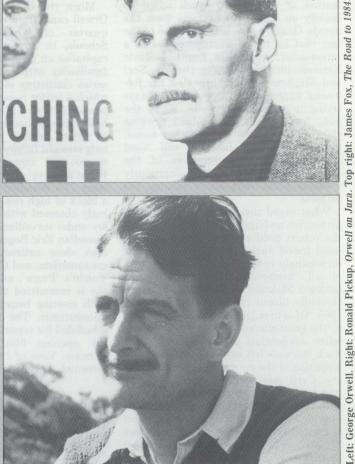
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keted somewhat like a Linguaphone record as 'Two weeks of Doublethink on Level 1', with some of the offerings only tenuously related to the Orwellian theme. It might be argued that Born in Flames sat very uneasily in the 'Freedom is Slavery' slot, but Carry Greenham Home was obviously entirely appropriate to 'War is Peace', and in any case a book which is reputedly selling 50,000 copies a

day in New York, as 1984 is, has defini-

tively entered the public domain.

The cover of the old Penguin edition of Charlotte Brontë's famous novel bore the following legend: 'It is said that there are three books every woman reads, Rebecca, Gone With the Wind and Jane Eyre.' The sentence was enough to convince me that a peculiarly perspicacious publisher knew that I had been reading Rebecca under my desk. But what it really suggested is that all popular literature depends for its success on an almost guilty complicity between author and reader. Even if Penguin's bold assertion no longer holds good in 1984, some works can still pretend to a kind of universal currency. Thanks in part to the examination system but more to their popular qualities, it may be stated with some confidence that the two books which every schoolchild reads are Lord of the Flies and Animal Farm.

Orwell (and to a lesser extent Golding) occupies a very specia place in British culture because of an extraordinary capacity, evinced in Animal Farm, for myth making, a capacity that has been described as the process of making the cultural seem natural. It is as though his books have been always already there in the popular consciousness and their author were merely the scribe taking notes and printing them. Orwell has the reputation of a satirist, the 'Modern

Swift', yet few writers have embraced their culture with such affection. 'There is something distinctive and recognisable in English civilisation,' he wrote in 'The Lion and the Unicorn', '... it is your civilisation, it is you.' Therefore if he is in some way wired into our culture, Orwell's works ought to translate particularly well to the screen, and in the year of 1984 it is fascinating to see what the media have made of the long awaited bonanza.

We have still not quite reached the point in the year at which Winston embarked on his diary (a date which, incidentally, figures in the NFT programme), yet no sooner was the New Year perceptible over the horizon than the trickle of Orwell programmes seeped on to television. The trickle rapidly became a flood, ranging from the Alan Plater play Orwell on Jura, through a series of six Arena programmes (inexplicably scheduled so that the episode devoted to 1984 was not screened on New Year's Day), to a two-part exchange between experts, chaired by the BBC's new male pin-up Nick Ross who signally failed to hold the ring between Thatcher-bashers and Christian evangelists like Prof Brian Griffiths. Meanwhile the London public was able to sample 'Thoughtcrimes' at the Barbican, mar-

BBC2's six-part Arena series was a serious attempt to look at the life and works of Orwell, and included recorded testimonies of still-living contemporaries, archive footage, dramatised episodes, and last but not least Orwell's biographer Bernard Crick, who has more than come into his own this year. For all his academic weight, it cannot be said that the series put across anything except the most perfunctory interpretation of 1984, or indeed any of the novels. Some of Orwell's best critics and most interesting contemporaries are of course dead, people like Koestler, Isaac Deutscher, Aneurin Bevan, but if Raymond Williams is correct in claiming that Orwell disturbs our conventional notion of literature (and it would be interesting to know why Williams did not participate in the film), then it does not seem quite legitimate to include archive footage of the *real* Stalin when referring to Big Brother. Even Crick, who does not hold with psychological speculation, allows that things were a bit more complicated than that.

Above all there was one very curious feature of this series, which relied so heavily on voice-over extracts from the novels: Orwell's own voice, in spite of the fact that he had a wartime career as a broadcaster, was never heard. Ludovic Kennedy picked this up on Did You See? and Stephen Spender provided the following explanation: 'Orwell was always trying to be somebody else. So in the pub, for example, he "talked working class". Actually, he had a rather monotonous voice.' So, however, did Nigel Williams, the writer-producer of the series, whose flat and incongruously youthful tones were heard reading the

What saved these films from being as pedestrian as Nigel Williams' diction was the robust good sense of Orwell's childhood friend Jacintha Buddicom, Crick's increasingly craggy scepticism and, best of all, moments from an interview between Malcolm Muggeridge and Cyril Connolly filmed (in black and white) in 1965. 'Of course,' opined Malcolm in Part 6, 'the great success of George was having leftist credentials and a rightist view. Such snippets left one desperate to see a screening of the conversation in its entirety. Cyril meanwhile averred (on what had been a not very close acquaintance with George at Eton), 'We were the stuff of which second elevens are made,' and suggested that Homage to Catalonia was 'slightly weakened by having too much politics in it'! The sight of these literati, self-consciously lying back in the grass and chewing stalks while a BBC crew hovered attendance, would have been pathetic were it not so funny. It is possible that all the best bits were chosen to include in the film, but they certainly contributed a great deal to it. There was a rare glimpse of Orwell's second wife Sonia, as well, and of course Hampstead friends such as Jon Kimche and Tosco Fyvel.

Granada's The Road to 1984 (screened on Channel 4), directed by David Wheatley, written by Willis Hall and with James Fox in the Orwell role, was similarly uneven. It was clear that this particular road passed through Wigan, but not altogether obvious why George's epiphany on British Rail (the moment where, from a passing train, he catches the eye of a girl cleaning out a blocked drain and realises she also suffers) was a necessary prelude to his denunciation of totalitarianism. In fact, Willis Hall takes too many short cuts for his account to be convincing. One particularly flagrant, and even offensive, such liberty concerns the departure from Jura of Susan, the nanny Orwell had engaged after his first wife's death to care for their adopted son. Susan's leaving is attributed to a territorial dispute with Avril, George's sister, who had arrived to take care of her brother, whereas Crick makes it clear that what occasioned this change was a

political row between Orwell and her boyfriend David Holbrook, who was at that time a Communist. No doubt this subject is too difficult for a television discussion in 1984. James Fox is a clever piece of casting, but the part is woodenly written and leaves him little scope.

Much the best television homage to Orwell came from the slightly surprising quarter of Thames Television for Schools, in an attempt, no doubt, to capitalise on the presumedly widespread familiarity with this author. This is a series consisting of five programmes in which a writer is asked to give his or her personal view of what 1984 means under headings supplied by Orwell's ministries of 'plenty', 'peace', 'love' and 'truth'. The only straight failure to date (the sequence is not yet complete) is Christopher Priest's 'Love', a dramatisation of his story The Watched in which a couple in a block of high rise flats become increasingly obsessed with the notion that they are under surveillance. But the American comedian Eric Bogosian's 'Plenty', a oneman show satirising the anxieties of consumerism, and Czech dissident Zdena Tomin's 'Peace', an explanation of why she is committed to disarmament, were both riveting because both were highly idiosyncratic. The Bogosian, indeed, is scheduled for repeat on Channel 4, where the opening film, Anthony Burgess' Personal View of 1984, has already been screened.

Burgess, by now, has developed a number, but this does not prevent him performing it extremely well. His face and voice have both become more pitted with the years, to the point where he is beginning to resemble Auden, so that it is perfectly possible to be mesmerised into paying little or no attention to what he is saying. Yet his message is relatively simple: the Burgess line is that 1984 is not 'about' 1984 but about 1948, about rationing and shortages, and the shabby lives unfit for heroes that, he maintains, people led in postwar, Labour Britain. Fairly soon after this, it should be noted. Burgess himself went into sunnier exile. What Burgess ignores in this version is the Cold War backdrop to the novel which, to hear him talk, you might think entirely concerned with razor blades and domestic politics. Yet in twenty minutes or so he puts over an admirably succinct account of his reading of Orwell, pitched deliberately at those aspects of the writer likely to interest a teenage audience.

It might have struck viewers as decidedly odd that none of these television offerings included a dramatisation of 1984. However, this was not for want of trying on the part of programme producers. The current reason is that the film rights of 1984 have been sold and a film is now in production at Twickenham, but in the past it has been quite simply the result of opposition from Orwell's literary

1984 (BBC TV, 1954): Donald Pleasence and Peter Cushing.



executors and subsequently his estate. There were in fact a couple of television versions plus a film, and the latter, were it re-released, would be enough to strike terror into the heart of any novelist who aspires to more widely acknowledged fame and fortune. Produced by Holiday Films—though rumoured to be directly or indirectly financed by the CIA—Michael Anderson's 1955 effort is a straight up and down Cold War reading with, for good measure, a happy ending.

The principals are played by Americans, Edmond O'Brien and Jan Sterling, who scamper as unconcernedly as possible through what appear to be remaining London bomb sites, but who lack the physical reticence to deliver the clipped dialogue that British love scenes of the period demanded. For O'Brien at least this was one of a number of films he made in Britain at the time, quota quickies of one sort or another, so that his presence in this film (doubly unfortunate since it meant that the name of Winston's torturer had to be changed to O'Connor) only points to the demise of the British film. O'Brien is, frankly, too old and too plump for the part, while Sterling is just too plump. But if neither of them as a result achieves the kind of intensity of desperation which the novel, at least, requires, Michael Redgrave, as O'Brien/O'Connor, is simply languid. It is not hard to appreciate Sonia Orwell's expression of horror at this work.

Nigel Kneale's television version, made for the BBC in 1954, is a rather different case. The only print apparently available, or at least all that the National Film Archive has to show, was taken straight off the box and is of extremely doubtful quality. This is a great pity, since the film, which stars Peter Cushing as a wonderfully neurotic Winston, has much to recommend it. It is less concerned with geopolitics than with interpersonal relationships and the pursuit of Newspeak, and a real effort is made to put over the principles of the language to the viewer. Most impressive of all, however, is André Morell's imposing performance as O'Brien and the extraordinary development, under torture, of an erotic relationship between him and Winston. This having been shown, the tenor of the ending scarcely matters since the viewer, exhausted from the effort of making two plus two equal five, cannot much care what happens when Julia and Winston meet again.

To date, therefore, 1984 has generated two basic readings, both of which have been reflected in the way television has celebrated the Year of Orwell. In one the novel is taken as a prediction and the game is to discover how much has 'come true' or whether Orwell 'got it wrong'. Did he predict micro-processors, nuclear war, the Apocalypse, and so on? However, since Orwell himself stated that this

was not a book about the future, the other line of approach, cornered by Burgess but pursued by others too, is to say, 'Well, of course, 1948 was just like that, there weren't any razor blades, you know...' So one crucial reason why Simon Perry and Umbrella Films, who are currently trying to beat the clock with a new production of 1984, also beat other postulants who wished to secure the rights is that they will have none of either of these views.

Simon Perry explains that this is a follow-up film for himself and Mike Radford after the success of Another Time, Another Place, and that the idea was only conceived as late as October 1982. They were convinced that an American company would have secured the rights, but on enquiry discovered that a Chicago lawyer by the name of Marvin Rosenblum, a total unknown in the movie business, was the actual owner. Rosenblum, himself, had gone to no small trouble to acquire 1984, boning up on Orwell's collected works before laying siege to his widow Sonia, who was known as a difficult woman. More or less Sonia's last act as her husband's literary executor was to sell Rosenblum the TV rights and film options on 1984, but with the proviso that, when made, the new version should not be a technological fantasy on the lines of Star Wars. It was this stipulation that explained why, as late as 1982, with his property rapidly peaking in value, Rosenblum had no suitable shooting script before him.

Enter Radford and Perry, with the view that the cardinal mistake in approaching the material is to update it. 'Curiously,' says Perry, 'that is the big trap, and almost everybody who approached Marvin wanted to do it that way.' Many candidates also wished to set the film in America, 'and that again is a mistake because it should be set nowhere or, rather, in a satirised version of London.' The film as it is made will in fact be shot on location mostly in the East End of London, but architectural ideas will be imported from elsewhere, particularly in the conception of the four ministries which dominate the city. But Perry firmly believes that the way to do 1984 is to accept two things, first that the book is not a prophecy, and secondly that, 'In the year 1984 one must bear strongly in mind that Orwell was writing in 1948 and that all the ideas came out of the Europe Orwell knew, so that he takes his present world and satirises it to an extreme point.' Gradually it becomes clear how the 1984 project, scripted by Radford, provides a clever follow through for Another Time, Another Place: 'It's a complete flight of fantasy,' (Perry again), 'as soon as you start to make a film you realise how many holes there are in the book. It isn't a real world at all, it's shot through with contradictions, so what we'd like to do with this film is to shoot a story like a dream.'

In the face of competition from David Puttnam and Hugh Hudson, Perry managed to clinch a deal which included Virgin as the backing company and John Hurt in the role of Winston. This actor

1984 (film, 1955): Edmond O'Brien and Donald Pleasence.



was central to the Radford-Perry conception of the film from the start, owing to his ability to appear both vulnerable and even seedy and immensely attractive at one and the same time. Winston is to be the ordinary man with a dreadful secret—that he's holding on to his memory, and even making it work overtime.

If the central focus of the film is to be this, however, it is clear that the casting of O'Brien, who enters the struggle to dominate memory through Winston, will be just as crucial. Perry would not be forthcoming except to say that the part had been offered 'to a mega-star'. However, he did expatiate on his conception of O'Brien: 'He is not a man cruel of his nature—he has just completely mastered doublethink, and if you've mastered this you can still be a complete man and be living a nightmare. So O'Brien has to be played by someone who makes the audience want to grasp the principle of doublethink. They should be straining to see five fingers themselves. O'Brien is not villainous, it's just that what he's propagating is totally terrifying, and the audience should come out of the movie thinking "Christ! WHAT was that?"

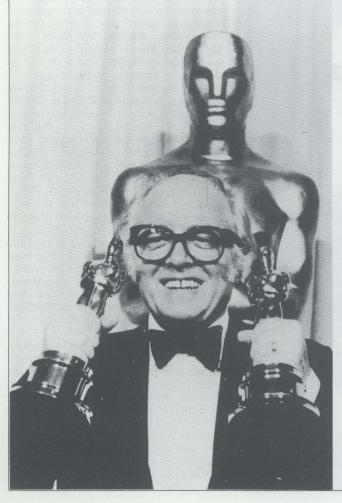
Other respects in which Perry and Radford's 1984 will be novel and original derive from considerable research by themselves and others. The vexed question of the identification of Big Brother with Stalin is neatly avoided by reference to Crick and to Orwell himself. Big

Brother is 'handsome, commanding, reassuring, stern, benevolent', none of which elements adds up to the traditional Uncle Joe, and according to Orwell's biographer the idea sprang from an advertising slogan for a teaching agency. Thus Big Brother will more closely match Orwell's description than that of the CIA. It was also interesting to discover how the Umbrella team intends to handle Newspeak, the principles of which take up so much space in the novel, and moments of intensity such as Hate Week or the Two Minutes Hate. The convention to date is that the Two Minutes Hate must be a cross between a football crowd and a revivalist meeting, but Mike Radford has found much more potent examples of British wartime propaganda in the Imperial War Museum. It looks as though his Two Minutes will be inspired by a particularly virulent anti-Nazi film scripted by Dylan Thomas, the secrets of which are closely guarded. Newspeak, on the other hand, will primarily figure in slogans, rather than as a spoken language or texts to be read, but the graphics will be authentically 'period'.

When most discussions of 1984 have centred on the dreariest kind of futurology or on how dismal postwar Britain was, it is refreshing to learn that, at Umbrella Films, production meetings address questions such as the number of victims to include in the set-piece public execution. Nor are such concerns frivolous: they are integral to the conception

of the 1984 that will hit our screens this autumn, and which will be a judicious mix of authentic detail and fantasy. It promises to be a resounding success.

The Perry-Radford approach to 1984, however, raises some interesting general questions about the Orwell legacy and consequently the media treatment he has received. As a literary figure Orwell has been the focus of conflicting views of the British Left, providing succour for the Socialist Little Englanders (of the E. P. Thompson persuasion) who assert that the British road to socialism is the kind of crooked road of genius that Blake referred to, but offering nothing but counsels of despair to those (like the editorial board of the New Left Review) of more continentalist mind, whose constant lament is the absence of authentic Marxism in this country. It is easy to caricature a debate which so readily runs into self-parody, yet it mobilised British intellectuals for a generation and more, and for this reason alone would be important. There is no reason why a film version of 1984 should feel obliged to address Orwell's politics, but tackling such issues must be a major duty of television. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that the 1984 crop has not yielded a single programme devoted to Orwell's political legacy, especially since the one thing that Orwell demonstrated beyond doubt is that politics is an essential part of British (he would have said 'English') popular culture.



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# BRITISHCINEMA

# MILLAR · BENNETT · and PARKER

Not so long ago, most 'films for TV' were made in Hollywood, often with no more ambition than to fill the necessary breaks between commercials. In Britain, categories were confused by the BBC's whim of calling any kind of one-off production a 'play'. In any case, it was all television. Distinguished British TV films of only a few years ago, such as the Frears/Poliakoff Bloody Kids (1979; shown in 1983 in cinemas and reviewed by many as a new film), Kevin Billington's The Good Soldier (1981) and Peter Duffell's Caught on a Train (1980), were not snatched from the schedules and enlisted as evidence that British filmmaking, then almost universally thought to be in the doldrums, was really doing none too badly.

The change in attitudes has been rapid and far-reaching—and necessary, to sustain a British movie renaissance still founded on barely more than half a dozen

# Life before death on Television

cinema films. The 1983 London Film Festival included a hefty line-up of new British productions. It would have been a pathetic entry if it had been restricted to films made for cinemas. Some of the TV-backed productions, admittedly, did hardly enough to earn their outing away from the small screen. But in general the

films were marked by quality craftsmanship, tackled more ambitious and relevant material than has lately been the lot of most British cinema films, and gave work to an encouraging number of talented people. Interestingly, the most universally (and deservedly) praised entry was also the most televisual: John Schlesinger and Alan Bennett's An Englishman Abroad.

No one wants to look the Channel 4 gift-horse in the mouth, or to do anything to dent the growing confidence behind British film-making and the all important willingness to invest in films. But for all that, there remains a nagging feeling that what we've got, or look like getting, isn't quite enough: that the movie movie, as opposed to the TV movie, enjoys not only a wider vitality but the power to probe more deeply, that there are crucial

aesthetic differences, as well as differ-

ences in the quality of the experience,

Richard Eyre's Laughterhouse (Greenpoint Films). Photo: Sophie Baker.



and that what is on view is a fleet of Mini Metros, nice little cars as far as they go, but not the Mercedes or Porsches or Jaguars that some of the more farfetched publicity might suggest.

Every director one talks to wants his work shown on a cinema screen, usually because that way it has more hope of achieving some kind of lasting life, instead of sinking without trace in the featureless television sea. 'It's a measure of how comprehensively TV has altered our perceptions and expectations of

movies,' Herbert Kretzmer noted recently, 'that we are no longer unduly surprised to find an ambitious enterprise like *The Weather in the Streets* making its debut on television, slotted in between a documentary series and the News...'

So is British cinema 'alive and well and on television', as the reassuring cliché has it? Or is this a belief built on astute publicity, a general determination to have something to cheer about, and a practical recognition that the Mini Metro movie is the answer to some otherwise

intractable problems? There are all kinds of questions involved, ranging from the economics of the industry and the habits of audiences to aesthetic issues which have to do with more than merely the ratio of close-ups. Arguments about cinema films versus films for television are not of the kind that can be neatly wrapped up and answered. In this feature, we have asked half a dozen practitioners to comment on where, from their own points of view, things seem to stand. The debate will continue.

## **MAMOUN HASSAN**

# 'Journalism and literature use words – are they therefore the same kind of writing?'

I am impressed by the modest claim of some television executives that British cinema is alive and doing well—in television. Why stop there? What about British politics, education, sport, music and darts?

Fewer and fewer people go to the cinema, with long intervals between visits for those who do; and the shared and complex emotions associated with the experience of a film in the cinema fade or are forgotten altogether. So it becomes difficult to resist the assertion by some critics, who should know better, and television executives, who are flattered to believe it, that a film is a film, no matter where it is seen, that an audio-visual medium is an audio-visual medium. It seems enough for some that the two media use pictures and sound to insist that there is no difference between them. Journalism and literature use words-are they therefore the same kind of writing? What is worrying is that some practitioners are now peddling the same arguments. The only and much repeated discovery by those who cross the line of any dissimilarity between films for the cinema and films for television is that TV needs more close-ups. Which makes Drever the first television director.

Dialogue between the two industries is difficult. To those who work in the film industry, television represents not only a great life-eater but an avaricious consumer of cinema films-at a cut price imposed by an all too powerful and smug industry. To television, those who support a separate identity for cinema films are snobbish, pedantic and reactionary. A fuller discussion will have to be left to another time, but, for the present, one simply asks whether there is not a failure of the film-makers' judgment and imagination if they believe that a film seen in the abstract dark of the cinema, where the image is larger than life, the sound fuller and more enveloping, where a crackling piece of paper is an unendurable invasion, requires the same subject and form as a film seen at home in the context of everyday life, where a ringing telephone, children, cats, dogs, passing traffic and interruption by commercials can be tolerated and accepted; or, from another perspective, that one speaks to hundreds and thousands about exactly the same things and in exactly the same way as one would to a few.

In 1982 the film industry's net foreign earnings were £76m, the television industry's £2m; investment in the film industry was around £40-50m, in the television industry anything between £1,500-2,000m. A closer study of the way the two industries operate will make it clear that the disparity is inevitable.

To justify the licence fee, the BBC has to attract a national audience; so must commercial television, whose paymasters, the advertisers, wish to sell their goods in the UK and not abroad, in Birmingham, West Midlands, not in Birmingham, Alabama. International sales provide the jam (until recently jam was also provided by the UK; foreign sales provided caviar). The film industry on the other hand is unlikely to recover the negative cost of a film in the UK. Not only does it have to sell its product abroad, but also it must, in the selection of projects, take into account long delays-maybe a matter of vears—before a particular film is shown in foreign cinemas. Television films and programmes have to be topical; cinema films have to be more universal than timely. The commercial risks are also different: investment in television product is such that there is both a floor and a ceiling; with investment for the cinema you can lose everything or succeed beyond the dreams of avarice.

It must seem churlish to insist on the difference, when in the last twelve months television has given us two magnificent series, Boys from the Blackstuff and Jewel in the Crown, and when Channel 4 has backed fine individual films and has revived and sustained the independent sector of the British film industry. Of course there are fine film-makers working in television. The film industry has been in such trouble that it would be daft to expect film-makers to ignore the



MAMOUN HASSAN Managing Director NFFC

only secure financier available. However, to ensure that we have a flourishing and vital television service it is more important that there are gifted practitioners who know and intuit what television can do and cinema cannot. In insisting on the differences I am not making a value judgment that one is better than the other, although I am alarmed by the way that television in its entirety seems to substitute itself for life. The two media, both for the makers and for the audience, are tuned to different harmonics. Television is at its best dealing with concepts, explaining and describing (it is no accident that the drama documentary is the preferred form of television drama); cinema is at its best when it concerns itself with the ineffable, with that which cannot be expressed.

There is a battle going on between cinema, video, cable and television. Exploitation of a film in each medium is rapid and concentrated as the film is handed from one medium to another. Greatest revenue for a cinema film is now no longer necessarily derived from a theatrical release. It is this fact, I believe, which has led to the claim that we must consider film in a new way. To me that is simply confusion. Whereas a cinema film can be exploited by all media, a television film cannot. The hybrid film has, I believe, led to the emptying of cinemas. Loose talk of a marriage between cinema and television is dangerous; a union has to be carefully arranged. Congress between two such unequal partners will mean the death of cinema.



Tusse Silberg and Ewan Stewart in Christopher Petit's Flight to Berlin (Road Movies/BFI Production Board for Channel 4).

# **DAVID PUTTNAM**

# 'It would be encouraging to see a few more noble failures instigated by British producers.'

At some point last year I changed my mind about television. For the last few years, probably out of a combination of enthusiasm and ignorance (in equal part), I had convinced myself that where drama was concerned, the creative differences were minimal and that 'a film was a film was a film.' I now believe that I was wrong, but maybe not for the obvious reasons.

Many but not all the differences can be put down to 'money', the inadequate length of television shooting schedules being the most fundamental. A majority of people outside production do not realise that each 'shooting day' affords the opportunity of a certain number of 'setups'. The number of set-ups dictates the options you have in the cutting room. Insufficient 'set-ups' or 'cover' prevent the director and editor from cutting pace and energy into a scene. The number of shooting days also dictates the ambitions of the director and cameraman with regard to their establishing shots. Complex background action and camera moves become impossible. These two factors alone result in the static and frequently turgid style of television drama.

The constricted schedules have also affected (or infected) the actors. There now exists a type of polished professional acting style which owes everything to 'getting through ten pages a day' and little to credibility—the 'getting inside the skin of the character' which is the hallmark of genuine screen acting is, with the odd honourable exception, largely lost to original television drama. In addition to these constraints, also add insufficient pre-production and casting time, insufficient editing time and risible scoring and mixing opportunities. Most important of all, a consequent lowering of creative horizons in tragic acknowledgment of these financial and other inadequacies.

Two years ago, when I started producing television drama, I viewed all this as a challenge. At first it was; but the limitations get you down eventually—you know you are asking those around you consistently to come up with a silk purse from not much more than a sow's ear. In consolation, television helps towards a continuity of employment and the most



DAVID PUTTNAM Executive Producer

marvellous opportunity to work with untried people without risking being 'drummed out of the brownies' in the event of failure. It also, on the odd wonderful occasion, allows for the ultimate satisfaction—a beautifully crafted 'silk purse', An Englishman Abroad being a perfect example.

It is true to say that, given the present environment in British cinema production, television alone offers the opportunity to deal in subjects of *purely* domestic interest. But even this is a double-edged sword. Of course, it's galling to have to debate and dispute with

some American executive who regards people and events this side of the Atlantic as being of little or no interest. Without for one minute suggesting that we accept their attitudes as our own, I do suggest that we haven't been that clever in putting our point across. Better surely that we adopt some of the stratagems of the Eastern European film-makers and develop the art of allegory and allusion. I've felt for a long time that our 'take it or leave it' attitude to co-production was inadequate and in fact hid an inability to think our way around cultural restric-

tions in a genuinely creative way. Frequently such 'creative compromises' don't exist, but it would be encouraging to see a few more noble failures instigated by British producers.

There is a real danger of the film/television debate becoming sterile as the academics move in. Most of what needed to be said has had more than its fair share of coverage. It's true that with help from television British cinema has come a long way in the past few years, but not far enough. Our films have to be much, much better if they are to sustain world

attention. That is a question of doing it, not just writing or talking about it. The new German cinema vanished up its own cathode ray tube (is there still such a thing?); with luck and some good movies that needn't happen in the UK. We must set about dramatically improving the quality of the average film and then sit tight and wait for the gems. It is this last possibility, the odd jewel in a welter of improving productions, that is television's real contribution to the present cultural mix, most particularly to the British film industry.

# JEREMY ISAACS

# 'If we can sustain the impetus... by 1987 we shall have funded nearly a hundred films.'

Film is at the heart of the creation of fictions for the screen, any screen. Channel 4 chooses to make films to show on television because television viewers enjoy them. We choose to take advantage of the skills and talents of British filmmakers. We choose to make films, for the most part made in Britain, to express something of the mood of these islands now. (I say 'these islands' because some have been set in Ireland.)

In each of our first two years we have set aside £6m, and endeavoured with that sum to bring into being twenty low budget films. To begin with we tried to get films made whose entire budget was only £300,000. Not easy. We needed more funds and, therefore, partners. Few of our films now cost less than £500,000. Channel 4 sees a return on investment when we screen films on 4. Our partners have to get their money back in other ways. It is important that they should do so.

In its first year, crucial to the Channel's fortunes, and, some thought, to its very existence, it was necessary to screen the films we made almost as soon as they were ready, with only a brief theatrical window for some half a dozen before they were shown to television viewers. We could not justify showing in their stead a placard marked 'the film you should be seeing this evening is still in the cinema.' But now, nearly two years on, we shall soon have over thirty such films. Each of them deserves to be seen more than once. A season of repeats will buy time. It should be possible, for the future, to offer most film-makers who work with us the possibility of a year's theatrical exposure before our need claims their work.

Some argue that films made on this scale are neither one thing nor the other; too slight for the cinema, too slack for television. The low budget compels a reduction in scale. The desire that the work be seen in the cinema militates the other way. Better, perhaps, to go either in one direction or the other. There may

be something in this. We intend, for the future, to allow a more flexible range of budgets. The miniature will still be miniature. It is essential for Channel 4 that we hold budgets down. We spend what is sometimes seen as public money. We cannot afford the lavish practices and rewards of Hollywood. But we also hope, at the other end of the scale, to allow more room for ambition. We shall be prepared, where the script seems particularly worthwhile, or to have real commercial potential, to make, on occasion, a higher contribution than we have done in the past, perhaps as high as £750,000, as part funding of films which will cost twice that. For that, too, we shall need partners, and hope to find them at the NFFC, if it survives, in the City, in cable, and in Wardour Street.

What sort of films do we make? There is no one simple answer. David Rose backs his judgment of the script, and of the abilities of the director. He avoids the merely commercial project that we cannot begin to afford, and the film that will easily find backing elsewhere. He is broadly interested in subjects that touch contemporary nerves, but keeps an eye open for the fantastic. He cares that the films should reflect our preoccupations here in Britain, rather than appeal to a bland international market. But he is not doctrinaire. Some 'Films on Four' have strong narrative lines and obvious international potential. Others again are set abroad. And, in addition to our prime twenty, we have helped finance, and thus secured for Channel 4, films as varied in origin as Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas' El Norte, Alain Tanner's In the White City, Gabrielle Auer's Eyes of Birds and Voyage to Cythera, the new Angelopoulos.

We have helped fund features by Israeli and by Turkish independents. Wim Wenders' company helped us with Flight to Berlin; in return we helped him with Paris Texas. Film may speak to and for a national culture, but film-makers



JEREMY ISAACS
Chief Executive, Channel 4

speak to each other. Chauvinism is inimical to any live film culture.

I make no large claims, but I believe 'Film on Four' has contributed something of value to British film-making. We need to see ourselves on the screen. It is good that Joseph Despins' Disappearance of Harry was shot in Nottingham; Charles Gormley's Living Apart Together in Glasgow; Barney Platts-Mills' Hero (the first ever Gaelic feature) in Argyll; Michael Darlow's Accounts in the Borders, The Ploughman's Lunch at the Tory Party Conference at Brighton.

I am glad we were able to help the BFI with The Draughtsman's Contract and with Ascendancy; delighted that Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen shot The Bad Sister for us on video—far the most innovative new piece we have screened. I am glad we were able to invite Jack Gold, Maurice Hatton, Chris Petit, Kevin Billington, Gavin Millar, Peter Duffell, Jerzy Skolimowski to direct for us. We were proud to present Mike Radford's Another Time, Another Place, and proud to have funded a distinctive debut in Neil Jordan's Angel.

That is only part of what has been done. There is more to come. If we can sustain the impetus with which we have begun for another three years, then by 1987 we shall have funded nearly a hundred films. In so doing, we shall discover something of what the talent of British film-makers can achieve. Time then, perhaps, for trumpets.

# SIMON PERRY

# 'Television never killed the cinema, it was simply waiting conveniently in suburban living rooms...'

As a producer, I want any film I bring to fruition to be seen by the largest possible audience. This is partly because filmmaking is the most expensive artform ever devised, and must continually justify its cost to stay alive. And it's partly because film production demands a hefty emotional investment which can only show a proper return if millions and millions of people tell you with their backsides that you've done a good job.

The pursuit of these two rewardsmoney and acclaim—leads a producer to examine the audience more closely than on the basis of sheer numbers. Films now reach people via an array of different media. Which delivery system yields the most cash? And which form of presentation does the most justice to the creative aspirations of the film-makers? Immedi-

ately, we perceive a problem.

With the exception of a tiny annual handful of genuine blockbusters, such feature films as manage to show a profit do so through income from exhibition in the home, not in the cinema. Broadcast television, paycable and videocassettes underpin the world market for most products. So why bother with the cinema at all? Yet the big screen remains the creative goal of serious film-makers; and if this is mere ersatz Parisian snobbery, it maintains a remarkably powerful grip on film students and many directors working in TV. From the practitioners' point of view, it seems that only in the cinema is the popular art of visual storytelling fully tested and realised.

Behind the tendency among creators

to regard television as a second best means of film exhibition lies, I suspect, a valid distinction to be made between visual drama and illustrated drama. Film is most powerful in its effect when what it conveys is predominantly visual. When film is used as a dramatic medium, the stories it tells best are those in which the narrative unfolds through action and the characters are revealed through appearance and behaviour. Such stories can cross barriers of language, class and even culture; and there is a certain depth of impact on the senses that only images can achieve. But the TV set has not so far proved to be an entirely satisfactory gallery for the primal art of the movies. The size of the screen has something to do with it, and the fact that little sense of occasion or commitment attaches to the activity (or passivity) of watching a film in one's own house.

Further, since its presence in the home dictates that the social role in our lives played by television is in essence wholly different from that of the cinema, broadcast television programming has developed with almost no reference to the cinema. Initially radio with pictures, its the same token its drama is predomidenies the fact that the more visual a film, the more it loses by being shown on the box. American TV movies, for all their

unique strength was, and still is, as a purveyor of illustrated information. By nantly verbal, drawn from literature and the stage, and generally described as plays. Interestingly, movies are a popular form of TV programming, but no one





SIMON PERRY
Independent Producer

speed and action, employ the same basic visual grammar that the small screen demands for all its material: a succession of single images delivered linearly as one delivers a piece of information, with dramatic pace imparted by the cutting process and with particular reliance on faces in close-up, or talking heads.

What with commercial breaks to contend with as well, and the poor picture quality of most domestic TV sets, filmmakers can be forgiven for feeling that a television showing does little to feed their pride in their work, whatever the ratings. Perhaps this can be deprecated as misplaced artistic ego; but the more film-making is principally sustained by a delivery system which presents it as disposable material with its visual cutting-edge dulled, the more creative and production values will deteriorate and the unique power of film-to move, to influence, to excite, to change, more swiftly and profoundly than any verbal means of communication-will be left unrealised.

I am not at heart as pessimistic as I may sound. I blame broadcast television for nothing except the rotten prices it has paid for movies over the years by exploiting its frequently monopolistic (duopolistic in Britain) structure. Fortunately the stock of films still prey to the TV maw is fast diminishing, and fortunately Channel 4 is showing a realistic attitude towards television's involvement with film-makers. I am much encouraged also by the appearance of cable television and videocassettes. Sentimentality on behalf of the cinema seems largely inappropriate: there will always be seekers after the big screen experience, and we should recognise that we are simply at an awkward point of social and technological transition.

As Lynda Myles and Michael Pye pointed out in their introduction to The Movie Brats, cinemagoing has declined in accordance with a change in social habits. Television never killed the cinema; it was simply waiting conveniently in suburban living rooms when people chose to stay at home rather than travel into the city of an evening. Yet although the cinema ceases to be viable as a business for more and more exhibitors every year, two types of cinema-the flagship showcase and the art-houseseem far from extinction. As a producer I see theatrical exposure continuing as a key element in the marketing of a film, even if of itself it yields a further decreasing share of a film's overall income.

Meanwhile much of the former cinemagoing public is sitting at home waiting (aware of it or not) for the boffins to bring the big screen experience to their houses. Video technology is still infant in many respects. Electronic pictures more than two feet across are too unpalatable to deserve to be regarded as a visual medium. But the popularity of cable and home video is evidence enough that the appetite for feature films is undiminished, and that broadcast television alone does not sate it. Even with the TV set as the only current mechanism on which movies can be played in the home, a lot of people demand visual drama as well as, or perhaps in place of, illustrated drama. The sooner our work as filmmakers can be presented to them in such a way as to convey fully its scale, its technical excellence, its emotional power, the more surely the art of cinema will be kept alive. And as a producer I am bound to note that the financial returns from cable and cassettes much more fairly reflect the size of the audience than either theatrical or broadcast television, so in future a success may really be a

# **GAVIN MILLAR**

# 'I for one am not going to wait around before I can see Zelig, The King of Comedy, Fanny and Alexander.'

The first problem is psychological: 'Is it,' people will ask with a knowing glint, 'a film? You know, a movie?' The short answer is that they're all movies. Some are a range of celluloid formats from 3D to Academy, some a tape/film mix, some wholly tape. Some are called plays. Leave out for a moment the procedural and aesthetic comparisons. There are drawbacks and advantages to all of them.

Was it an advantage or a drawback to Nicolas Roeg that UA wouldn't accept the unknown Frederic Forrest in an \$8m project called Hammett in 1976?—thus occasioning a delay of seven years, the agony of forty scripts (Wenders' figure), a change of director, several nervous breakdowns no doubt, and an endproduct not universally acclaimed as either Coppola's or Wenders' best. And the cost? Who's telling? Who could work it out? This, for what it is worth, is the sharp end of The Cinema. Nothing quite so extravagant happens in Britain, but it will serve as a definitive example.

Was it an advantage or a drawback to the Goldcrest/Channel 4 First Love series to have to knock them off in about twenty days for well under £1/2 m? These were 80-90 minute movies shot on 35mm and aimed ultimately for theatrical release. June Roberts' and Peter Duffell's Experience Preferred But Not Essential has had them queuing round the block in New York and is apparently the word to drop at the bar at the Sherry Netherland. How to compare two such different products as a Zoetrope feature and a Goldcrest TV minimovie? I did a First Love called Secrets and it was the tightest budget and schedule I've ever worked. But it was a movie. Ironically, though transmitted under the 'Film on Four' rubric, the C4 press info dossier (the most literate and informative of all TV companies') listed the First Love series not under 'Movie Notes', but in the body of the schedules, alongside the news and farming hints. It was, after all, made for

That's the psychological problem. What is a British picture? Then there's the social one. If it's the difference between going out or staying in, theatre or sitting-room, what will drag a man out on a wet winter's evening, two tube changes and a £3.50 ticket, etc, to see something he'll see six months later armchair-bound and virtually free? Only rarity, fashion, censorship or irresistible excitement. Are those, then, the qualities that distinguish film from TV? I mean, some films will never get to the sittingroom-foreign, difficult, rude. Others demand to be seen now or one will never be able to hold one's head up in the Frog and Ferret. Or they simply demand to be seen with the ideal picture and sound quality-all television screenings are a bad second in this respect, and I for one am not going to wait around before I can see Zelig, The King of Comedy, Fanny and Alexander and so on. Few domestic TV dramas, even on film, are liable to qualify under these heads, even the 'ambitious' ones (that's to say those which have cost more than the company can afford but less than the project

I've made five fiction 'pieces' in the last two years, one on 35mm, three on 16mm and one tape/film mix.\* I wouldn't expect to drag much of an audience out to the cinema in Britain to see them, even Secrets, which pulled C4's biggest audience at the time (4.3m, perhaps on the lure of teenage sex and freemasonry). What seemed to make them appropriate for TV was exactly what might disqualify them from the international investment needed for big budget movie-making. I don't mean that the subjects were too small. On the contrary, in some cases they were too big. (Set aside the question of whether the things were well done or no.) Alan Bennett's Intensive Care was a fine script to work with, but its acute

\*Intensive Care (sc. Alan Bennett. BBC. 16mm); Secrets (sc. Noella Smith. Goldcrest/C4. 35mm); Stan's Last Game (sc. Willis Hall. BBC. 16mm/tape); The Weather in the Streets (sc. Rosamond Lehmann/Julian Mitchell. BBC/ Rediffusion. 16mm); *Unfair Exchanges* (sc. Ken Campbell. BBC. 16mm).



combination of tragedy and farce was not one to commend it to international audiences, or to the producers who must guess their taste. It was also strongly regional, accurate, funny, affectionate about Bennett's neck of the south Yorkshire woods. But I don't believe it was the apparent parochialism which would have been a disqualifier. It was its refusal to confront small subjects with big capital letters—Love, War, Sacrifice—or give easy answers. It was seriously about death, jealousy, sexual identity, parents, children, about whom and which it made desperately funny jokes. It was exactly the kind of thing that our serious TV tackles seriously. Where would a lot of our fine writers be without it? Are they not part of British cinema too? Are Plater, Gray, Bleasdale, Mortimer, Poliakoff, Hare and others only real, or only good, when they write a theatrical movie? Some might scandalously suggest that the boot is often on the other foot.

So was Intensive Care a film or just another TV play? Is An Englishman Abroad part of the British cinema? Of course it is, if for no other reason than that it is a Schlesinger, and a good one too. What about the earlier series of Bennett plays for LWT, one by Frears, one—on tape—by Anderson? Or the rest of the recent BBC Bennetts, including that perfect little monologue by Patricia Routledge, A Woman of No Importance, directed entirely on tape by Giles Foster, with a precise elegance which no celluloid version, it seems to me, could have bettered?



Joanna Lumley in *The Weather in the Streets* (BBC TV in association with Rediffusion Films and Britannia Television).

We're talking about vocabulary only. There are more aesthetic considerations. The size and precision of the image, taking care with close-ups on the big screen, panoramas on the little, allowing lethargic rhythms to develop on the big screen (In the White City) which would be dangerous on the little one; audience expectation, of length, of pace, of attentiveness, and so on. But it's no longer a business of chalk and cheese. What matters is that enough money is found for projects that need it, and enough of an audience to get it back—it's the old trick of minimising the compromise. The talent has always been there. It didn't die because it went into TV. It went into TV because the audience went there first. The current rash of hyperbole about the new British cinema will fade. Of course much of the TV drama 'showcased' at the LFF was merely routine. The pendulum always swings too far at first. There will always be the excitement of the big number that TV can't do, even if it doesn't always have to take seven years. And there should always be the intimacy and intensity of the little one too, even if it would be nice to have a few more days on the schedule.

# **ALAN BENNETT**

# 'My scripts, where wheelchairs make up the armoured division, are not ready-made movie material.'

In 1982 I took part in a symposium at the NFT during the London Film Festival. Most of the discussion that afternoon was about what was wrong with the production of films in Britain, whether for distribution in the cinema, for television or both. It struck me afterwards (and I was as much to blame as anyone else) that the six of us on the panel had sat there having a jolly good whine. Many of the audience were students, who were probably only too anxious to make films whatever the conditions. We, who in our various capacities were in the happy position of being able to do so, should have taken account of that. We didn't. So I'd preface my remarks here by saying that I've been very lucky in that the films I've written, at any rate for television, have all actually ended up on the screen and in a form not too distantly related to what I imagined when I wrote them. Adding though that, being television, those films have about as much permanence as a fart in the wind.

Maybe it's because I've never directed a film, but I don't share that passionate attachment to film that many of my (slightly younger) contemporaries have. To me it's just another way of telling a story and if the story can be told better on tape and in the studio, well and good. I don't enjoy the taping process as much, but that's because filming generally

comes with bacon sandwiches.

On my own subjective scale writing for the theatre comes first, feature films second and television (whether film or tape) last. This is partly because at the moment I find television easiest to write, theatre well nigh impossible and feature films (or grown-up films as I tend to think of them) somewhere in between. But the scale has more to do with the permanence of the various forms. A theatre play, once put on, will normally get into print and so can be read and reproduced. A feature film, once shown in the cinema, starts out on its career and has a history, a life. A BBC television film has no history. It is an incident, with luck an occasion, the bait for the writer a nationwide audience and his work a topic of general discussion the next day. If cable catches on it will put paid to that. In New York for instance one seldom hears TV discussed, because with umpteen channels the audience is by now too fractured. If similar fragmentation happens here the lure of writing films for television, the chance of in some small way addressing the nation, disappears. But long before that, I suspect, the television companies will have ceased to finance films and the single play or TV film will be as rare on television here as it is in America.

I've written about a dozen TV films,



Dramatist and TV Playwright

eleven of which have been produced. I've written four feature films and to date none of them has been produced. My first film script was a farcical comedy, The Vicar's Wife (1966) for Ned Sherrin, then at Columbia. In 1973 I adapted Evelyn Waugh's Handful of Dust for John Schlesinger. I was quite pleased with this script, but it proved too expensive to make. In 1981 I adapted John Lahr's life of Joe Orton, Prick Up Your Ears, for Stephen Frears and Chrysalis Records. The boss of Chrysalis thought he was getting another Cage aux Folles, so it's not surprising that didn't get made. I also did an adaptation of The Old Crowd, my TV play that Lindsay Anderson directed, as a film for Lindsay and the Swedish Film Institute, but there was a boardroom revolution in Stockholm and our script went out of the window.

At the moment I have a film I've written with Malcolm Mowbray that seems to be going ahead, but I'll believe it on the first day of principal photography. Unless one counts a short sketch in *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball*, nothing I have ever written has ended up on the cinema screen. And actually (because it was too dirty) they cut the sketch. So my answer to any question about the difference between films for TV and films for the cinema is that in my experience one gets made and the other doesn't.

In terms of writing I don't think one can talk of feature films and TV films in the same breath, and it's not simply a question of scale or scope. It seems to me to have something to do with the space between an audience and the screen. On television one does not have to raise one's voice. The relationship with the audience is intimate, the tone conversational. A cinema audience is physically further away from the screen, so that one's tone, and the tone of the writing, has to be different, projected more. Somehow (I can't explain this) the space between the audience and the cinema screen must be matched by a corresponding sense of space in the film. Perhaps air is a better word. There has to be more air in a film. This may be utter nonsense, but there are definite practical differences. I watched An Englishman Abroad with an audience at BAFTA. Several crucial lines got lost because the laughter from previous lines overlapped. Watching it at home this didn't happen. If it had been written for the cinema the dialogue should have been less dense, the possibility of laughter catered for. This is partly what I mean by air.

I was slightly taken aback by the success of An Englishman Abroad. None of my previous TV films has received anything like the attention devoted to this one. Some of this was undoubtedly due to it being shown first at the London Film Festival and reviewed by a better class of critic. And then the upper classes and espionage are always dear to English hearts, more so certainly than the touching stories of sudden incontinence north of the Trent in which I generally specialise. An Englishman Abroad is bolder and more polished than my earlier films thanks entirely to John Schlesinger, but I did feel that if some of my earlier stuff, particularly the films directed by Stephen Frears for London Weekend, had been put in a similar film festival showcase they would have fared almost as well. As it is they now languish in the archives (sic) of LWT with no prospect of ever being seen again.

The frustration of such situations confirms my old-fashioned faith in print and I try whenever possible to get my television scripts published. But writing TV films would seem a more purposeful and worthwhile activity if the BBC and the independent companies developed a sensible and accessible archive system, where one's work was in a library and could be made available with the minimum of fuss. I know Channel 4 was supposed to cure everything from the decline of the film industry to unwanted



Alan Bates in An Englishman Abroad (BBC TV)

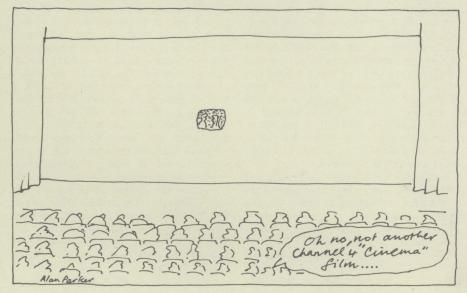
hair, but its contribution in the matter of repeats has been more modish than helpful (i.e. I haven't figured in it). If only out of respect to Lindsay Anderson, I feel Channel 4 owes him a showing of *The Old Crowd*, his only TV play. It was screened once opposite 'Match of the Day' as part of LWT's 'New Look to Saturday Night'. As a result it was seen by about six people (Richard Ingrams considers it the worst play he has ever seen: there can be no higher praise). I could go on, but this is the kind of whining I referred to at the start.

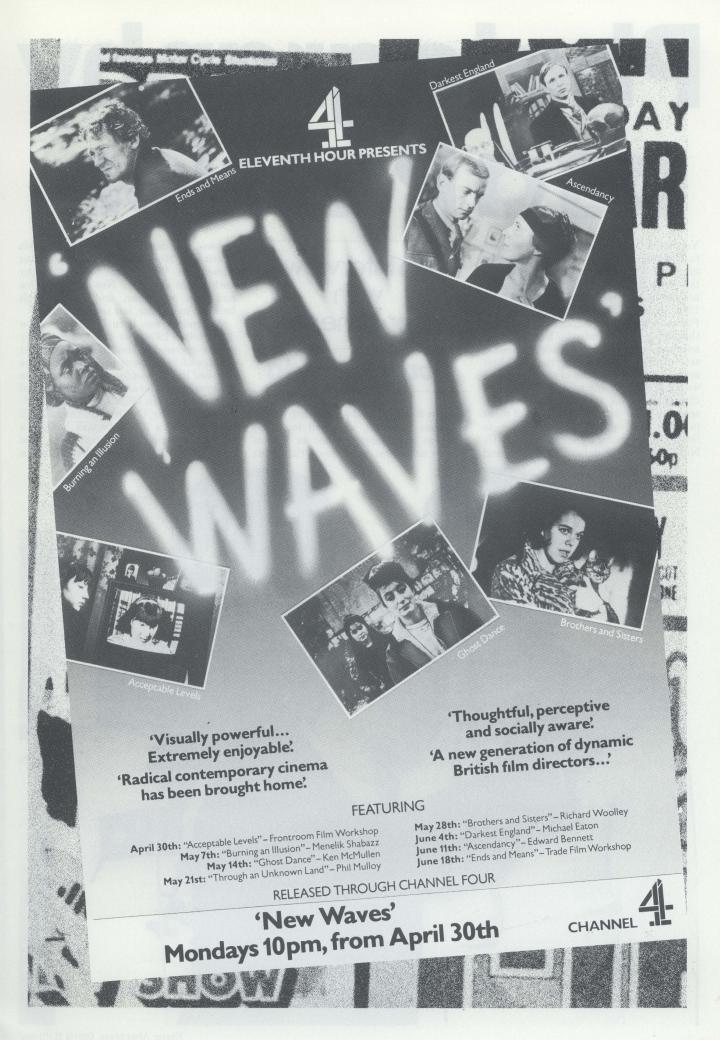
Behind a lot of the questions that are raised lurks an unspoken one: how do we make it big in America? Risking being hauled before Colin Welland in the Barnes Magistrates Court, charged with insulting behaviour, I'd like to ask why do we want to? The answer is: because we don't just want to make films, we

want to Make Movies. Or some of us do. The essential difference it seems to me is not between films for the cinema and films for television but between films and movies. There is a lot of playing soldiers about it. Forget film, there are many directors who would be just as happy conducting a small war. To which moviemaking is the next best thing: getting the troops off Omaha Beach appeals to them as much as getting the dialogue on to the screen. By talent and temperament I am not in this game. My scripts, where the infantry is recruited from aunties and wheelchairs make up the armoured division, are not ready-made movie material. But the European directors I admire, like Truffaut or Olmi, don't eat their hearts out because they're not big in Arkansas. Why should we? Mrs Thatcher has the answer, but does she know anything about films?

## and PARKER

Director and Cartoonist





# Photography as a Passion

You know how it is early in the evening in Havana, when the buses are still running and overflowing with people and the last screening at the Cinematheque has not yet begun? Well, we had walked from 12th to 23rd Street and cut through Paseo to watch the Academy Awards at the house of a friend who had a special antenna for his Soviet-made television set. April (not always the cruellest month) is the only time of the year when we could occasionally tune into Miami TV channels. It was the first time we had seen the Oscar ceremonies, but that night in 1978 our excitement would rise to fever pitch. Among all the nominees (De Niro and Jane Fonda, Hal Ashby and

# **An interview** with **Nestor Almendros**

# Jorge Posada

Warren Beatty) stood a Spaniard, almost a Cuban Spaniard, who had made his mark as a cinematographer in France. But to us he was much more than that.

He was a Cuban exile now imposing his talent on Hollywood, no less: Nestor Almendros. When Almendros won, our enthusiasm exploded: Nestor Almendros had won an Oscar, and his triumph became, in a sense, our own triumph.

Almendros was born in Barcelona on 30 October 1930, the child of a family wholly opposed to the Franco regime. At the age of 18 he went to Cuba, where he majored in Philosophy and Letters at the University of Havana and made several amateur films. In 1959, after having studied film at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome and holding a position as professor of Spanish at a New York City college, he decided to return



Nestor Almendros, Dustin Hoffman.

to Cuba, where he worked in documentary and in his spare time shot a film of his own, *Gente en la Playa*. In 1961, disillusioned by the development of Castrism, he opted for a new exile, this time in France.

Nestor Almendros has made more than 50 shorts, worked on some 40 feature films as director of photography, and written a book recounting the evolution of his professional life. By 1980, he had made six films in the United States. In 1978 he won an Academy Award for his work on Days of Heaven. In subsequent years he was nominated for Kramer vs Kramer and The Blue Lagoon. In 1983, he obtained his fourth Academy nomination for Sophie's Choice.

I interviewed Nestor Almendros at his New York apartment, in a spacious living room decorated by a French poster of the film *Paris vu par...*; a room with a view of the eternal symbol of New York and the movies, that gigantic Art Deco structure, that architectural wonder which is the Empire State Building.

## JORGE POSADA: What did you do when you first went to France?

NESTOR ALMENDROS: At first I was a pseudo-student while I earned my living teaching Spanish. Later on I began to make films for French educational television and in 1964, quite by chance, the producer Barbet Schroeder asked me to finish the movie Paris vu par.... The director of photography working on Rohmer's sketch in the film suddenly abandoned the set because of an argument, and almost by accident I happened to be there. These first assignments in France as a cinematographer, which could have been the means to a career as a director, quickly came to represent for me an end in itself—photography as a passion.

# You won an Academy Award for Days of Heaven. Did this influence your career or make you consider taking a different path from the one you were following in French cinema?

I've really tried not to let it change my work. Even so, some change is inevitable. For example, you are offered work on movies with bigger budgets, and then you have to make sure that these films will not be of a lesser quality than the low-budget films. As you know, my roots are in the avant-garde, in experimental cinema, but I do think that you can also achieve quality and retain a margin of artistic experiment, even if you're dealing with a film with a huge budget.

# What did the Oscar mean to you: in terms of your own development, as a symbol of recognition of your work, from, if you will, a sentimental perspective?

For a director of photography the Oscar is the greatest honour he can receive from the film industry, for the simple reason that it is the only award that exists for cinematography. Film festivals don't have awards for cinematographers. Besides, an Academy Award, whether you like it or not, whether you agree with it or not, has one important virtue: it is not an elitist award. It represents a generalised opinion, to a certain point, a



Sophie's Choice: Kevin Kline, Peter MacNicol.

popular opinion. Really, I was very pleased when I got the Oscar.

# I remember that it was presented to you by Kim Novak. Was this something special for you?

Yes, as a matter of fact it was. Kim Novak is an actress I very much admired and fell in love with when I was younger. I was very surprised and, as François Truffaut and Guillermo Cabrera Infante pointed out, I was also lucky; the award might just have been handed to me by an ageing silent screen star but instead I got Kim Novak, who is still quite beautiful.

#### You have worked with Terrence Malick, Randal Kleiser, Robert Benton, Alan Pakula... Do you get along with American directors?

I haven't had any difficulties. Of course, before accepting a job, I always do a bit of research. I ask the electricians and engineers (who know everything that goes on) and if they tell me that the director is unbearable, a tyrant or hysterical, I decide not to work with him. Right now I'm in a position where I can allow myself the luxury of turning down proposals, although this is no credit to myself when we consider that I'm offered two or three films a week. Years ago, turning down a film proposal was a truly heroic act, because it meant that I might end up unemployed. But those directors with whom I feel comfortable are also charming people. I've made two films with Robert Benton; I would work again with Pakula and Malick if they ask me.

# Do you feel there's a difference in the way American and French directors work?

Not so much among those I've worked with. Benton, Malick and Pakula are all children of the *nouvelle vague*. Their methods are not so different from those of French directors. What does make quite a difference is the size of the budget

Domicile Conjugal: Jean-Pierre Léaud, Hiroko Berghauer.



at hand. An American film, precisely because it costs at least ten times as much as a European one, demands much more from the crew. Typically, many more feet of film are shot, and each scene contains a volume of production which you wouldn't ordinarily find in European movies. In Days of Heaven, for instance, we had a trainload of three hundred extras—that in itself requires great physical effort. Also, American cinema has an international vocation, so to speak: it is the most commercial but it's also the most popular. That's why this transition I've been making in my career is interesting and somewhat risky. With Eric Rohmer and Truffaut I had captured a specialised audience and now my goal is to gain a wider, popular audience. This is what excites me: knowing that a movie like Kramer vs Kramer has been seen from Alaska to Patagonia, from Singapore to Zagreb, and has made a stop in Havana—where it was shown on television—along the way. marvellous, fascinating.

It was shown in Havana, but your name didn't appear in the credits.

Yes, that's true. I know that several of my films (La Collectionneuse and The Blue Lagoon, for example) have been shown in Cuba without my name ever appearing on the screen. When I won the Oscar the official daily paper, Juventud Rebelde, printed a list of winners but somehow failed to include the award for best cinematography. But worse things of this sort happen in Cuba. For example, when William Faulkner's book The Wild Palms was reprinted there, the translator's name-Jorge Luis Borges-was not mentioned anywhere in the edition. I believe it is much worse to suppress the name of a great writer like Borges than to ignore a mere cameraman. By not mentioning me in their reviews, by cutting my name off the credits, they are according me an importance I don't possess. The activities of these censors are amusing and ridiculous.

Various directors have worked throughout particular stages in their careers with the same cinematographers. I'm thinking of Bergman and Nykvist; Hitchcock and Robert Burks; Saura and Luis Cuadrado; Alain Resnais and Sacha Vierny. You've worked most with Truffaut and with Rohmer...

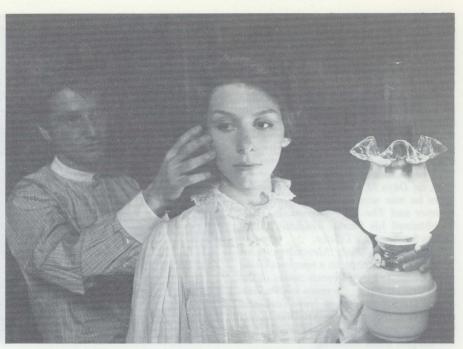
Working with the same people is essential, though variety must and should come into play from time to time. When you work with the same people regularly, you learn things from the director and the director learns from you. Bergman reached his peak from the time of his partnership with Nykvist. And Storaro's association with . . .

With Coppola?

No, frankly I don't think that partnership turned out to be particularly beneficial, however...

Storaro's collaboration with Bertolucci on Last Tango . . .

Yes, that was indeed a fruitful partnership. There are, of course, people who complement each other. Rohmer, for



Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent: Jean-Pierre Léaud, Stacey Tendeter.

example, is a very ascetic man, very intellectual. I, on the other hand, am a more sensual man, much more physical. And this dialectic and the type of conflicts that may arise between us while shooting can generate interesting results. I got my pat on the back from Truffaut and Rohmer. After so many years of collaboration (I've made nine films with Truffaut and eight with Rohmer) we are completely in agreement. We don't have to talk much about a next film, because now we share an accumulation of experience. We understand each other so well that just a wink might be enough to get a point across. Coppola and Storaro, who are both flamboyant, duplicate their respective flaws: the combination of excesses produces a sort of redundancy. I think the photography in One From the Heart is a mistake, like the film itself.

Henri Decae, Pierre Lhomme, Ghislain Cloquet, Coutard, Jean Boffety, Edmond Richard. These are all cinematographers who've worked in different countries but whose first films were made in France under the New Wave. Do you think there is such a thing as a French school of photography?

Yes, I think so, just as I think there is an Italian school and an American school. Or rather, I believe there are two French schools of photography. One is composed of people like Christian Matras, Henri Alekan and all those movies from the 40s and 50s: La Belle et la Bête, Les Enfants du Paradis, Les Portes de la Nuit, Carné's films, Duvivier's films, René Clair's films. These movies employed a sort of 'affected' photography, almost embroidered, with a great deal of lighting effects, based on detail, on the play of shadow against light. With the New Wave came a reaction, a swing of the pendulum. Raoul Coutard and Godard, especially, arrived at a type of photography that was completely 'naked', stripped of adornments. I was able to establish myself within this group, where I could develop my own style, although I've really tried to unite the two schools. I like photography which is refined but still retains a certain simplicity. Lately France has been producing a certain type of photography which is too 'clean', too academic. I'm opposed to my colleagues in this respect: I strive towards a photography of greater contrast. I often find that nowadays French photography has too little grit for my taste. Fortunately, there is a new generation coming up—a third school perhaps—like Philippe Rousselot on *Diva* and Dominique Le Rigoleur on *Agatha*.

Were you thinking of films like The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie and That Obscure Object of Desire?

Yes, Buñuel's last films, for example. Even though Buñuel is one of the greatest directors of all time, he was never much concerned with the purely aesthetic aspect of film-making. His films had good photography when he had good cinematographers, when he worked in Mexico with Figueroa on Nazarin, in Spain with Aguayo on Viridiana and Tristana. I think that during his last period in France he fell into the wrong hands. Mind you, this is a very personal opinion.

In your American films there's an intimate, sober tone, yet you make use of strong colour—something I believe you brought over from Europe. What comes to mind is that great pastoral beauty of Days of Heaven, the typically urban illumination in Kramer vs Kramer, all the interior shots and the hand-held camera that reminds me so much of Love in the Afternoon and My Night with Maud...

I'm glad you noticed the resemblance, especially about *Love in the Afternoon*. I'm also thinking of *Domicile Conjugal*. Certainly *Kramer* was derived from these films

Even in films with as much natural brightness and light as *The Blue Lagoon*, that certain tone, that economy of light, hints at your basic restraint. Do you think a project demanding a more exuberant,



Ma Nuit chez Maud: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Françoise Fabian.

complicated or outrageous type of photography like Apocalypse Now, Heaven's Gate or Raiders of the Lost Ark would encourage you to modify your style?

I don't know. I think that in Sophie's Choice and Still of the Night I return a little bit to the sort of lighting technique I tried to stay away from in my youth; lighting effects typically found in suspense films—big masses of darkness, a more 'flashy' kind of lighting... What do you think? But then, all that depends on the genre. I try not to have a style; if I have one it's not of my own volition. I try to do something different in each picture. The problem is that I don't succeed, because the man is his own style, and he cannot change it: it is inescapable.

A moment ago you spoke about Still of the Night and Sophie's Choice. You don't now work only for American directors?

No. After making those films I worked on two others in France: Vivement Dimanche! with Truffaut and Pauline à la Plage with Rohmer, projects which turned out to be lessons in humility because of their small budgets. It was a great pleasure for me to return to the two masters with whom I had worked so many times in the past. I will never renounce or belittle my past: I try to add to it, not subtract from it.

Who are the contemporary cinematographers who most impress you?

I admired Robby Müller's photography in The American Friend: I thought it was brilliant. In Hollywood there are those famous Hungarian exiles, Zsigmond and Kovacs; Zsigmond's photography in The Deer Hunter is formidable. Also Conrad Hall's work in Fat City was, twelve years ago, original, pure. Michael Chapman in Taxi Driver and Raging Bull; John Bailey's American Gigolo. In Europe, Vittorio Storaro of course, as well as Sven Nykvist, who-perhaps more than anyone else-through his own example has urged us to re-evaluate the role of the cameraman. Certainly, since The Silence and Cries and Whispers

cinematography has recovered its initial prestige. I say this because in the silent movie era photography was one of the stars of the film, but with the arrival of sound the interest in photography waned considerably. Now, once again, photography is in the spotlight.

Do you think there's a great difference between the camerawork of thirty years ago (Robert Surtees, Sam Leavitt, G. R. Aldo), that of fifteen or twenty years ago (Lucien Ballard, Conrad Hall, Douglas Slocombe), and what's being done now?

It was really Aldo who made the transition from earlier work to the photography done today. There's hardly any difference between Aldo's work and ours. With the making of *Umberto D* with De Sica and *La Terra Trema* with Visconti, he became the father of modern camerawork. He only did a small amount of work: don't forget that he collaborated with Visconti principally.

Actually, there are three distinct periods in the history of film camerawork. In the first period of the silent movies, we find a type of photography based on very uniform lighting; as you know, they shot in outdoor sets which had no ceiling and one missing wall, in which the camera was placed. In Chaplin and Keaton's first movies for example, the cinematographer used natural light, sunlight which was 'filtered' through white canvas. The same thing was done in the photographer's studio in the old days, and in the painter's studio. In other words, the technique came from painting. The lighting in these movies is soft, and there's hardly any shadow; it's not easy to tell where the light is coming from.

Towards the end of the silent movie era, German expressionism brought about a revolution in photography (that probably had its origins in the Kammerspiel theatre), and at this point we begin to see the use of lighting effects, the application of light in 'brush strokes', to bring out people or objects. With the arrival of sound movies came a very

detailed, 'studied' type of camerawork, by which particular effects were emphasised, given a certain value or meaning through the use of directional Fresnel light lamps. This was a technique that was suitable for black and white cinema, proper to it. Black and white film, because of its lack of seven colours, contains little visual information; the 'brush stroke' technique of lighting compensated for this inherent lack of visual information. Today, the tendency we find in colour film is much more realistic; the sources of light are justified as well as simplified. Aldo began his career with black and white films, but he made a film in colour, Senso (1954), which is probably the movie that had the most influence on contemporary cinematography. After Senso, the use of colour acquired new meanings. In fact Aldo died while shooting Senso, and Robert Krasker took over

Cabrera Infante (or rather, Cain) in his review of Senso, said of the two photographers: 'It's like a nude begun by Titian and finished by Ingres.' At least I think that's what he said; I don't know if I remember his exact words.

I think he was pretty accurate.

Gregg Toland, Rudolph Maté and Boris Kaufman: three men who were truly innovative cinematographers. In your opinion, who are the most influential photographers in the history of the cinema.

I am glad that you mention precisely those three names: three of the giants of cinematography; three isolated cases; three unique men. Toland had many disciples but so far none of them has been able to surpass him. When he did The Grapes of Wrath in 1940, Gregg Toland was thirty years ahead of his time. Maté was also way ahead of his time—he was a precursor of Aldo. Maté's work in Dreyer's Vampyr and La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc is absolutely modern; his lighting is soft, stark; it is imbued with a great simplicity. Later in Hollywood, where he made a second career for himself, he did the photography for Gilda: not a faultless film, but a work that plainly bears the signature of a great director of photography. Boris Kaufman is the other photographer whose work was very advanced; of course he was Dziga Vertov's brother. When I was shooting Kramer vs Kramer in New York, I invited Kaufman to lunch at a French restaurant near the studios. We had a long conversation and agreed to see each other again soon, but that was the first and last time we talked. He had suffered a stroke, and he died a few months later.

They have all influenced my style in one way or another, but the one who had the greatest influence on me is undoubtedly Aldo, not only because of his own work but also because I saw his films while I was studying cinema in Italy. When you're young you can be easily moulded, it's almost as if you're made of wax. I imbibed, lived and studied Aldo's work. I would say that I was also influenced by the *cinéma vérité* of the Kaufman brothers (although I discovered

them after I had discovered Aldo), by Jean Rouch, the master who inspired the French school of *cinéma vérité*; and last but not least by British Free Cinema.

In what way is film photography related to painting?

When I start work on a film I often turn to a painter or a school of painting as a point of reference. This is a technique that helps me achieve stylistic unity; if a film goes off into all sorts of different directions then it has no style. When we were making Truffaut's Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent, we looked at Victorian paintings; while doing Goin' South we went to the work of the American artist Maynard Dixon, who painted Western scenes; and when we made La Marquise d'O... we turned to German romantic painting. We did all this in a very humble way, without any intention of trying to emulate the values of these works; it was simply a method of obtaining visual information about a particular era. But if one is making a picture like The Last Metro, about a period in which cinema already existed, there's no point in turning to painting as a source of information. In such cases, you have cinema itself as a source. In Still of the Night we found inspiration in Edward Hopper, another American painter who himself was inspired by the cinema. Cinema turns to itself for sources, just as Borges' literature finds its sources in literature.

Here is a quote from your book, Days of a Camera: 'I've had the good fortune of photographing some of the most beautiful actresses on the screen.' Obviously, you've enjoyed doing so. What other actresses in movie history would you have liked to photograph? Louise Brooks in Lulu, for example? Simone Simon, Carole Lombard? Marlene, Greta, Marilyn, Ingrid, Ava, Lana...?

All those actresses are already icons; they are no longer people. They are icons of extraordinary, photogenic faces. I would have liked to photograph Marlene, principally. Some time ago I had the chance to meet her at a party, but I didn't go because it would have been nothing but a disappointment. I prefer to remember her the way she was when she made Shanghai Express, The Devil Is a Woman, Morocco. But all that is now a dream, and it should be left that way. All those great faces of the screen should be left on the screen, and live on in our dreams

I remember that von Stroheim once said he would not want to die without first having the opportunity to direct Greta Garbo; and Diego Rivera, the Mexican painter, wanted (I believe he got his wish) to paint a nude of Maria Félix. Is there any director with whom you would specially have wanted to work?

One of my biggest regrets is never having worked with Buñuel, though it could have happened. When he was in Spain preparing *Tristana*, Catherine Deneuve intervened in my favour, suggested to Buñuel that he take me on; she gave me her wholehearted support. Buñuel didn't like that at all; he told a mutual friend,



'I'm not going to hire a cameraman who sides with the actress.' I also would have enjoyed working with King Vidor. I visited him frequently during the last years of his life, and he was, perhaps, the American director I most admire. Fritz Lang is another director I admire tremendously. And, of course, Josef von Sternberg, particularly from a visual per-

How about Italian film-makers, say, Fellini, Visconti and Pasolini?

spective. I think I've cited the three most

visual directors of American cinema.

I'm under the impression that Visconti and Pasolini were a bit careless. Pasolini had flashes of brilliance—great ideas about lighting and design—but then, all of a sudden, he would do something that made no sense at all. Visconti, during his last period, made excessive and inelegant use of the zoom. Even so, they stand among the directors I would have enjoyed working with

In your book you say that working under Jack Nicholson's direction on Goin' South was the realisation of an old dream of yours, shooting a Western. Still of the Night is a thriller and The Blue Lagoon a South Seas adventure. Wouldn't you like to make a musical?

The offer has been made on several occasions, but I haven't wanted to accept it. Randal Kleiser wanted me to do Annie with him-finally it was John Huston who took on the project-but I didn't accept because I believe everyone has his limitations and I know my own. I feel the same way about doing science fiction: de Laurentiis offered me Flash Gordon but I passed that up too. As a spectator I thoroughly enjoy musicals and science fiction, but I don't feel capable of photographing them. I don't think I have much to offer to either of those genres. I feel this way particularly about musicals. I believe that in order to make a musical you have to know a lot about music and dance: I can't even dance a pasodoble!

La Marquise d'O...: Bruno Ganz, Edith Clever.

Besides the musical is an American art form, par excellence. You have to be American to make a musical.

Let's digress for a while from photography. In one of the footnotes in his book Un Oficio del Siglo XX, Cabrera Infante says: 'Everything I know about the cinema I learned from three people: Ricardo Vigón, Germán Puig and Nestor Almendros.' Could you tell me who taught you

all you know about cinema? When Guillermo said that he was being far too modest. Maybe what he meant to say is that we gave him the cinema as an addiction. But he had been a movie enthusiast before. Perhaps we helped him to look at cinema from a wider, more cultural perspective. However he continued to learn more and more, beyond what we could teach him. He is, without doubt, the greatest film critic Cuba ever produced, and also one of the greatest film critics in the whole of America, something that none of us was able to achieve. The person who turned me into a 'movie addict' in my first youth in Barcelona was a Spanish critic named Angel Zuñiga. a giant of a critic who continued to work at his art in the midst of Franco's fascism; the first one to put into practice, twenty-five years before the existence of Cahiers du Cinéma, the author theory. Zuñiga wrote a history of the cinema that was great for its originality and focus. It was a completely personal and independent book that mocked the fascists under their very noses-unlike Georges Sadoul's book which unjustifiably became more famous than Zuñiga's and is a Stalinist work to boot, replete with prejudices and commonplace observations. Zuñiga had a great influence on

At one time you also worked as a film critic. Did this experience have any effect on your work as a cinematographer?

I became a film critic in revolutionary Cuba rather circumstantially. When they

threw me out of ICAIC, I found myself on the street without a job. (They'll deny that they threw me out, but you see, they lowered my salary in relation to the salaries of other cameramen—they told me they had done so because the others were excellent cameramen and I was inferior to them and so deserved a lower salary. I got the message and I quit. Which must have pleased them no end, because they really had been hoping for a resignation.) At that point Carlos Franqui, the director of the newspaper Revolución, recommended me for a position at the nationalised magazine Bohemia. Rene Jordán, its film critic, had just gone into exile, and there was an empty seat. I got the job, which solved my financial problems and also taught me the discipline that helped me to develop and crystallise my thoughts. Film criticism allowed me to analyse the phenomenon of cinematography and (though I was not aware of it) taught me the language I would later need to carry on a dialogue with directors; a language of aesthetic evaluation that would adequately express my ideas about films or particular scenes

## What have you done with the reviews you wrote?

I still have them. My mother (who is still in Havana) put them in a scrapbook that somebody managed to 'smuggle' out of Cuba. But frankly I am not proud of those reviews; I had serious limitations. I 'had to' defend Soviet cinema and I 'had to' attack American films. I used to resort to a certain strategy, something the Communists eventually became aware of. I would defend, to counterbalance, Czech or Polish films, which were quite interesting, and only obliquely attack some Soviet films. I was imprudent in my mockery of their militarism and cheap heroics. I wrote all that and, for the moment, got away with it and my reviews were printed. But then Mella, the magazine run by the Communist Youth, published an article denouncing my reviews in *Bohemia*, which was something like an equivalent to a 'death sentence'. I wasn't dismissed in an official manner. I simply found out—on the street again—that I was no longer *Bohemia*'s film critic.

Have you seen many recent Cuban films? I try to see Cuban movies whenever I can and to follow developments in Cuban film, as I try to see movies made in other Latin American countries. Really, I wouldn't criticise Cuban film for its form; what I would criticise is its essence. I think there are genuine artists in Cuba; there always have been such people there. La Ultima Cena (The Last Supper), despite its many flaws, shows a very interesting concept of lighting. I loved that movie.

I can tell you though that sometimes you win battles which, at one point, you believed to be hopeless. I think all the battles we fought over there (which we believed we had lost, because of the clashes with the officials of the ICAIC and government authorities, because of the terrible situation we found ourselves in, because we had to leave, etc) in the final analysis became moral and artistic victories. Those who stayed behind eventually started to imitate those of us who left. Orlando Jiménez's cinematography in the short P.M. is totally modern and revolutionary in the true sense of the word. That movie was viewed by the Cuban officials as something almost monstrous; it was attacked and banned for being 'useless' to the Revolution, as well as for containing what they considered bad photography. The whole affair must have been like a time bomb, ticking slowly away. The bureaucrats at ICAIC didn't understand the film, but some people at the base-to borrow their own rhetoric-did, and later the impact of this picture (and also to a certain extent of my own film, Gente en la Playa, if you'll allow me such conceit) was evident in some documentaries and features.

ICAIC's earliest productions were somewhat pseudo-Pudovkin and pseudo-Eisenstein in style, wherein people took on painterly attitudes and poses and in which we found a rather Stalinist type of cinematography. After we all left, they began to make certain shorts like Vaqueros del Cauto, Gente de Mosću and Colina Lenin, but some of the people who made these movies also finally went into exile.

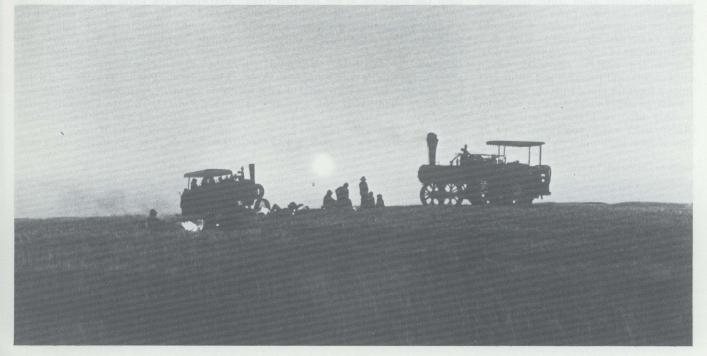
## Or found themselves caught between fear and censure.

Yes, they were completely ostracised. This fact alone is evidence of the influence we had on those people. As my Cuban friend Otto Jahkel says: 'Sometimes it is better not to criticise our enemies, because somewhere down the road they might mend their ways and learn: it is better to let them be.' But, though this may be a rather cynical boutade, I am sure that the one thing current Cuban leaders will never learn is that until they allow people to express other than official opinions and ideas there will not be a truly independent Cuban cinema.

Jesse Fernandez is another photographer who left Cuba to live and work in Paris. He has said that 'exile is something like self-analysis'. What has this third exile meant to you?

I would add that for some people, exile is like a whipping that awakens them and prods them onward. Exile, for me, was very advantageous; I was, in fact, lucky to have been practically kicked out of Cuba. They did me a great favour by restricting me, by making me leave ICAIC, and by not letting me write film reviews, otherwise I would still be there filming mediocre propaganda documentaries. But I think I am the same person I always was. I think I am the same man who, in a rather sneaky way, filmed Gente en la Playa in Cuba twenty-three years ago with a 16mm Bolex.



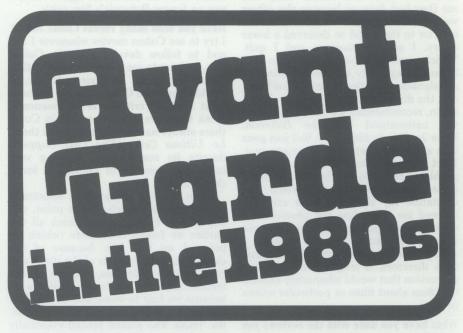


# Jonathan Rosenbaum asks whether the term 'avant-garde' and the attitudes it stands for, now has any real meaning.

Item: In assorted outdoor locations all over the US, from a Santa Monica pier to a park in lower Manhattan's Soho, Louis Hock has been showing a silent, triplescreen film of his own devising called Southern California. The film's imagery is of the colourful, mythical sort that its title suggests: placid neighbourhoods flanked by palms; a San Clemente flower farm; fruit and vegetables in a La Jolla supermarket; downtown Los Angeles glimpsed from the rotating Angel's Flight Bar or from the top of the Hyatt-Regency. Southern California is actually one strip of film run consecutively through three adjacent 16mm projectors which are aimed at the same wall. There's a gap of 221/2 seconds between the time that the first and second panels in the triptych appear, and again between the reappearance of the same images on the second and third panels. Every image, consequently, appears twice in each 45second cycle.

Rather than promote his movie in any ordinary way, Hock usually finds a public site (like the University of California's San Diego campus, or the street level of the South Ferry terminal in New York, where Staten Island commuters pass), sets up his gear, waits until nightfall, starts to show his 70-minute film on a continuous loop and waits to see what happens. Responses differ widely, and Hock appears to sayour them all. Some people walk hurriedly past; others stop. But in general people who have little else in common-most of whom had no intention of watching a movie in the first place, on their way to something else-find themselves entranced. The sheer beauty of Hock's landscapes rippling across the three screens, which sometimes trick the eye and mind by resembling one continuous widescreen landscape rather than three successive moments in the filming of a more narrow one, are occasionally undercut by subtitles. These describe what is being seen in the phrases of advertising jargon ('window to the world', 'renowned public amusements and murals') and recur and link up together along with the images.

Some passers-by assume that the film is some kind of literal advertisement. Others react more positively: Hock is fond of recalling a punk rock band called



the Armaghetto Ensemble, who turned up in the parking lot of the Santa Monica pier on a flatbed truck and furnished free musical accompaniment. Before a rare indoor screening at Berkeley's Pacific Film Archives, which played to a cheering capacity crowd, Hock encouraged the audience to get up and move about, laugh and talk if they wanted to; and they did.

Does such a screening set-up have political implications? Yes and no, according to Hock. Yes, in the sense that this is a 'truly public film rather than a commodity', set in the mundane public context of 'the billboard, the bus bench and the parked car.' No, in the sense that Hock regards it as, 'Simply the logical extension of my work and the best way to show it. I want an image bigger than those existing in available theatres. I want the audience to see the film from various angles and while moving. I want a large, heterogeneous audience to see my stuff, rather than the handful of familiar

**Question:** Is *Southern California* an avant-garde film, a public amusement, or a mural that moves? To what degree is the genre defined by the audience it attracts?

Item: Sara Driver's compelling You Are

Not I, a stark 50-minute adaptation of a short story by Paul Bowles narrated by a schizophrenic, was shot in black and white by a New York University graduate in her twenties. Stunningly acted (by Suzanne Fletcher, as the mad narrator and protagonist, who escapes from a mental hospital during the confusion after a nearby multiple car crash, and by Melody Schneider, as the uptight 'normal' sister who unexpectedly finds that she has to cope with her), the film is also shot and paced with a brutal rigour that suggests the style of a master like Carl Dreyer; the eerie music score (by Phil Kline) and subtle sound effects are no less striking.

The overall effect is of a wilful imagination bringing a deranged vision to life, piece by piece, confident in its power to overwhelm the world that we ordinarily regard as the real one. A conundrum about the boundaries of sanity and female identity, You Are Not I has earned a reputation at European festivals, and had a successful run last year at Manhattan's Public Theater (on a bill with the cult melodrama The Honeymoon Killers). To date, however, hardly a single publication in the United States has bothered to review it.

Question: Is You Are Not I an avant-

Southern California: Images on Louis Hock's triple screen.



garde film, a European art film made by an American, or an experimental narrative of indeterminate length that eludes such categories?

Item: Candace Reckinger's Occupied Territory, a half-hour science fiction short in colour about an international, all-female terrorist group, has also fared well in Europe and not been much seen in the USA. Like Hock but unlike Driver, Candace Reckinger has had a good deal of previous involvement with avant-garde film-making. She says that she wanted to make a film which was disturbing; and usually can't get it shown for precisely that reason. Too slick and well-crafted to make it in avant-garde venues, Occupied Territory is also too short and too intellectually challenging to wind up in the mainstream.

Mutatis mutandis, the same general problem holds for some of the most talented women film-makers currently working. Their originality banishes their work from conventional categories, even within the avant-garde. Leslie Thornton's beautiful and beguiling Adynata: Murder Is Not a Story, an extraordinary nonnarrative meditation on the fantasies spawned in the West about the Orient, can't deal with the fanciful racism that resides in our imaginations without being rejected by at least two trendy avantgarde showcases in New York for being racist. Ulrike Ottinger's wild and hilarious German feature Ticket of No Return has too much high fashion, storyline and Tati-style visual comedy to qualify as underground, too much eccentric inventiveness to find its way into the local Bijou. Reassemblage, a short about Senegal by Trinh T. Minh-ha, a Vietnamese writer and musician based in Berkeley, has an analytical bite and jagged editing thrust worthy of Godard, both pressed to examine the way we look at alien cultures, but not the sort of calling cards likely to persuade American Godard fans to see it.

**Question:** (a) Are Adynata, Occupied Territory, Reassemblage and Ticket of No Return avant-garde films? (b) As far as official avant-garde channels are concerned, do they exist?

Item: Movies as diverse as The 71/2% Solution (a Hollywood feature), Bad Timing (an Anglo-American art-house feature) and Raw Nerves: a Lacanian Thriller (a Mexican-American avantgarde short) all have the same theme in common: the crossbreeding of psychoanalysis and the detective story. But where can one go to find these three films discussed together? Fans of the first and/ or second are unlikely to have heard of the third, which is arguably the best and most original in the bunch. Manuel De Landa's Raw Nerves might also be regarded as the most ambitious, in so far as it constitutes a reasoned critique of Freud and film noir alike. De Landa plants his detective narrator in a public lavatory, where he spies a mysterious coded message on a wall—an allegorical depiction of a child's discovery of language, which implies that even a baby enters a social field as soon as language is encountered. Pitched in a zany manner which seems to reside somewhere between Mexican camp and Frank Zappa, Raw Nerves uses shrieking Day-Glo colours and violent optical transition devices to keep the spectator hurtling through the Kiss Me, Deadly style mystery plot, and concludes with a surprise ending which takes apart the detective story genre itself.

Unlike most of the films cited above, Raw Nerves is usually packaged and shown as an avant-garde product. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's allowed to exist in the same world with other films which explore the same theme, or that certain avant-garde programmers haven't derided it for not being more difficult to watch. Indeed, while some avant-gardists have objected to its strong narrative base, its avant-garde credentials tend to segregate it from the more popular movies that De Landa would like to make. (Having worked in computer animation used in TV commercials and station logos, he is not exactly a stranger to the mainstream.)

**Question:** How much does the term 'avant-garde' serve to direct us towards certain films, and how much does it serve to direct us away from them?

'The bad thing about the term,' says De Landa, 'is the bad thing about the notion of a vanguard in general—whether you're talking about the Communist party or about art films. It's a nineteenth century military conception. It presupposes the

Leninist notion that they are the representatives of the lower, exploited classes—or, in this case, they're representatives of the visionaries, of a different vision. And as soon as the avant-garde becomes their representatives, it's ridiculous, because it has never been like that. It has always fed on the most bizarre and contradictory tendencies going on at the same time, and that's what keeps it alive. The term lends itself easily to the use of people who want to construct a unified project—the vanguard project, the vision that everybody should have if they want to make films that are "politically correct", whatever sense you can give that term when you're talking about experimental film. On the other hand, it identifies a particular consumption set-up which in the USA is the college circuit, film club and film magazine—something which has its roots in history. That's all right; it's nicer to have a term to refer to.

De Landa admits that the institution of avant-garde film is useful to certain film-makers like himself, who want their work seen within a knowledgeable context, and less helpful for film-makers, critics and programmers who wish to address themselves to a broader spectrum. But in order to understand the roots of the problem more clearly, more than just the avant-garde has to be looked at; the mainstream has also to be considered.

For one thing, mainstream critics are much more conservative in their tastes

You Are Not I: Suzanne Fletcher.



nowadays than they were twenty years or so ago, when fashionable art-house fare tended to run more in the direction of challenging narrative conventions. (Later on, these challenges would harden into the tropes of lesser directors, and fresh challenges were avoided.) Film-makers as Antonioni, Godard and Resnais—who were then feared, debated and respected in rather the same fashion that Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola and Brian De Palma are heeded todaymight have been regarded with suspicion or outright hostility by several prominent critics during the 1960s. But at least they commanded more overall attention—to the degree that they often made many of the more entrenched American independent film-makers envious and resentful.

Such major films as Resnais' Last Year at Marienbad and Godard's Two or Three Things I Know About Her, despite their bold formal departures, were rigorously excluded from the avant-garde canons of taste which nurtured talents like Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger, with the result that innovative film-making began to develop two nearly autonomous traditions, each of which was pridefully ignorant and dismissive of the other. At best, this functions as a kind of friendly schizophrenia which often ensures, in ghetto fashion, that critic A deals with big-budget experiments while critic B deals with low-budget ones—and that A and B hardly speak to one another, except on special occasions. Somehow the unaffiliated and in-between spectator, who might be delighted by De Landa as well as Fellini, or by Louis Hock as well as Kubrick, gets boxed out of existence, leading to a mistrust of the implied world views of critics A and B alike.

In all fairness to the avant-garde tradition, its tolerance for a variety of viewpoints has certainly grown in the last few years: films with storylines are far more plentiful in avant-garde showcases than they used to be, for instance. But the tolerance of mainstream critics for difficult films has correspondingly shrunkleading to odd disparities for many of the rest of us. If the latest films of the English film theorists Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey garner more attention in the US today-more screenings and commentaries, that is—than the latest films of Robert Bresson or Jacques Tati, this certainly isn't because Wollen and Mulvey are more interesting and important as film-makers. It's merely because avant-garde programmers, distributors and commentators are equipped to deal with Mulvey and Wollen's Riddles of the Sphinx (1977) and Crystal-Gazing (1982), and their mainstream equivalents are unable to cope with Bresson's Le ProbablementDiable, (1977) and L'Argent (1983) or Tati's Parade (1973)—all of which have yet to reach the United States. Meanwhile, Wollen and Mulvey encounter few of the difficulties in getting their recent work shown that have been experienced by Marguerite Duras, Jacques Rivette, or even Antonioni, Godard and Resnais.

The difference, of course, is largely one of economics, and it might seem unfair



Mark Rappaport's Impostors: Lina Todd, Ellen McElduff.

to single out Wollen and Mulvey as overrated figures when the audiences they command remain relatively minuscule. The point to be made is that the needs of one kind of audience are being at least partially met, while the needs of a much broader audience are being chiefly thwarted. And woe indeed to the experimental film-maker unlucky enough to be trapped between those pre-defined audiences and categories, who can't be assimilated at all.

To adapt the titles of two of the more humorous and accessible avant-garde films, George Landow's 1969 Institutional Quality and Mark Rappaport's 1973 Casual Relations, avant-garde filmmaking today seems ruled by two distinct and sometimes contradictory forces: Institutional Qualities and Casual Relations. Institutional Qualities are all those facets of avant-garde films which make them acceptable to institutions—the degrees of formal interest, seriousness and experimentation and the relative modesty of budgets that allow them to be discussed in US avant-garde journals like Millenium Film Journal and October, screened in avant-garde showcases and generally admitted to the fold. Casual Relations, on the other hand, are



Adynata: Murder Is Not a Story.



those much less predictable and orderly transactions that take place between films and spectators—the spontaneous and often instinctive (rather than taught) responses that occur whenever unconventional fare is shown. Consequently, if the avant-garde film today might be regarded as a two-headed beast (as divided, in a way, as critics A and B), one of those heads is upright, responsible and civilised, the other unruly, wayward and potentially savage. Most of the major avant-garde film-makers, from Stan Brakhage to Michael Snow to Godard and Rivette, manage to straddle both categories.

Does the avant-garde film still exist? Ask a member of the avant-garde film community and you might as well be asking whether air still exists. Ask anyone else, and the question is more likely to take on a modicum of sense. On one level, as a continuing tradition, its survival, however precarious, can't be questioned. But as a functional term for identifying a particular sphere of interest, its use often becomes deceptive.

When people say "the avant-garde",' says Mark Rappaport, 'they often seem to be talking about a category, a subgenre, rather than work that breaks new ground or takes great risks.' (Something of a risk-taker himself, Rappaport has turned out five low-budget, unconventional narrative features since 1973, and has managed to acquire a considerable reputation in spite of the fact that none of the films has fitted comfortably within either an avant-garde or an 'art film' framework.) 'Avant-garde used as a description automatically bestows legitimacy and establishes reverence towards the subject, suggesting that it's considerably better than it is. It's an overworked word that usually applies to the most rarified coterie art. Sixty years ago, people would never have described themselves as avant-garde musicians or filmmakers. Now there is a kind of false pride and unearned elitism in being tagged as an avant-garde film-maker. Is anyone

more "avant-garde" than Hitchcock, Dreyer or Buñuel, to this very day? I have yet to be convinced.'

'My image of the avant-garde is, I guess, like everybody's,' says Leslie Thornton (whose work, like De Landa's, gets shown almost exclusively within avant-garde formats). 'It's the Dada era. That's when it really meant something, when there was a real awareness of what it was about. A lot of very good work—the manifestos, the critical work and the artwork—was produced in a short period. It wasn't a comfortable time. Now the avant-garde, once it's identified, is always immediately in a comfortable, accepted position. It's almost impossible not to be.

'There's no question about the integrity of Stan Brakhage's work and what he has accomplished; what he has identified as problems of expression using cinema. But he is the one who had the insight to make things happen on the line. And those people who emulate Brakhage, who identify his practice as the correct practice for the avant-garde, are not doing it; they're not functioning on that level. By making Brakhage a historical figure, you're negating his practice—at least in the kind of terms that I envisage it. So the people who would be practising within an avantgarde mode today are the ones who make the practice as difficult as he did, in his time. And that's probably not an easy thing to do now, for all sorts of reasons.'

Rappaport has problems of his own with exclusive definitions: 'I remember Jonas Mekas saying a few years ago, when he was still writing for the *Village Voice*, that there was only one avant-

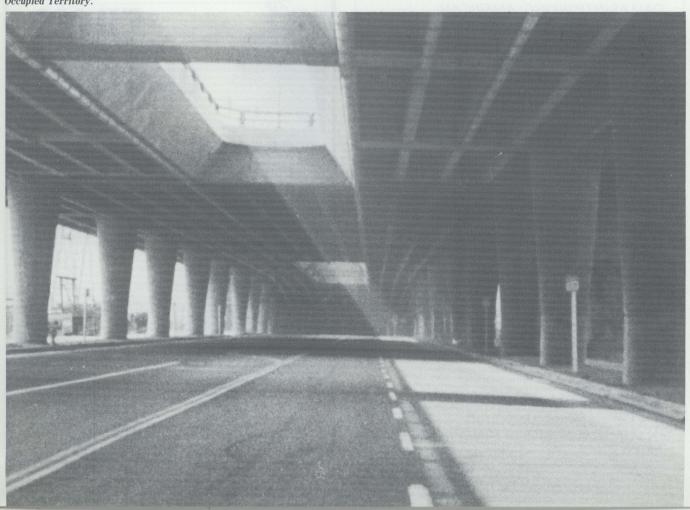
garde-implying, of course, that to be avant-garde was a great deal holier than not to be. And that avant-garde concerned itself wholly with structuralism. In short, it was a frozen concept; academia and avant-garde became synonymous. Once it becomes one thing and is not capable of being anything else, the concept is completely dead and useless. Some film critics still seem to think that warmed-over minimalism and selfreferential film-making is avant-garde, instead of the avant-garde being that elusive cutting edge, the wild side that has not been fully understood or explored or explained. In music, when the New York Times uses the word "avant-garde", it's to describe those composers whom the public don't seem to want to listen to. I'm afraid that avant-garde in the film world usually has the same connotations as your basic kiss of death.'

Sometimes, however, the meanings and implications of a term can shift when you move from one place to another. Leslie Thornton, after many years based in New York and Connecticut, has recently been teaching experimental film production in San Francisco, where she notes that the intellectual climate is appreciably different. 'Because there's less going on, people seem more engaged. They want to make an effort; there are more private screenings; someone just expresses an interest and you end up showing the film in a living room, or you go somewhere else to talk after a screening. If that happens in New York, it's very hidden. In New York, people say something like, "Oh yes, I'll be there, but I'm not, uh, in any condition to talk to you about it

afterwards." It's always an effort, even with your closest friends. I make the work as a kind of site for some exchange—it's meant to instigate something. That is part of the reason it happens, for me. And then nothing happens at the other end. It never works out in New York. But Steve Anker, who runs the Cinematheque in San Francisco [another New York transplant, one should add], has very quietly been an influential force; he really nurtures an environment of exchange."

Looking round at the experimental kinds of film-making being done, it seems possible to trace certain common preoccupations and traits in some of the most disparate works. Much of the work by men, for instance, seems to concentrate on male possessions: this is my house, my wife, my home town, my country, my hangups. A good many of the women seem more concerned with questions of identity and mirrors. Filmmakers as different as Chantal Akerman and Michael Snow, Louis Hock and Jean-Luc Godard, seem to be dreaming up ways of making their procedures more widely accessible, while more intransigent figures such as Leslie Thornton, Yvonne Rainer, Andrei Tarkovsky, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet seem to be working their way ever closer to the cutting edge of their own difficulty. But one thing that unites very few of them, and proves less than helpful in paving our way to most of them, is the appellation 'avant-garde'. If we wish to speak of them in the same breath, it looks as though we will have to find another strategy for defining what they are.

Occupied Territory.



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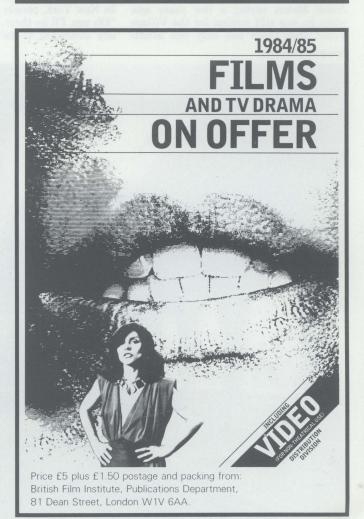
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# ETHE AUSTERE ART OF ATELIER



If the image of independent British cinema given to the world is that of a rather downbeat, grey-edged, political artform, sustained by its virtues of modesty and integrity, it is sometimes necessary to be reminded that fantasy and extravagance are no less a part of our inheritance. The films of Powell and Pressburger are nothing if not baroque. Our theatrical traditions, feeding into cinema, include the artificial as well as the realist. From the point of view of painting, the set designers at Pinewood and Elstree include some of the finest fantasy craftsmen in the world. In addition to this, there has been the recent runaway success (success against the odds, so to speak) of Peter Greenaway's The Draughtsman's Contract. No need to mention Monty Python. Thus fantasy in one form or another is alive and flourishing. Against this background the work of the Brothers Quaij\*—severe and difficult surrealist ventures combining puppets, mime, costume and music, written by Keith Griffiths and animated by the Quaijs—begins, perhaps, to take on a less forbidding, a more welcoming air. Plainly their work is cosmopolitan and avantgarde. But it is also, I would hope to

Of the two sides of the collaboration, the first thing to point out is that the Quaijs themselves, twins Stephen and

demonstrate, humorous, witty

accessible.

Timothy, are not in fact British but American. Born in 1947, they were brought up on the East Coast, near Philadelphia. The European admiration for things American in matters of popular culture—a widespread phenomenon in

### Mark Le Fanu

the wake of the Second World Wartends to obscure an interesting consideration, that Americans themselves, when they are sensitive and intelligent, are sometimes critical and cautious about their patrimony. While Europeans looked westward towards the United States in the 1960s, the Quaijs looked passionately towards Europe. A chance exhibition of Polish posters seen at the Philadelphia College of Art (where they went in 1965) kindled in them a feel for Surrealism. More or less at the same time, Tarkovsky's Ivan's Childhood and Paradjanov's Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors opened their eyes to the possibilities of grand, operatic, art-based European cinema.

Europe, then, was the goal from the start. A stepping-stone to Europe is England. Their main interest being in animation and illustration, it was into this latter department of the Royal College of Art that they enrolled in 1969. As so often in art school, however, they were left pretty much to their own devices.

Unencumbered with the care of their professors, the interest of the Quaijs gradually drifted towards film; and before gaining their diploma in 1972 they succeeded on their own initiative in making three shorts. Two of these I have seen. Der Loop Der Loop has a couple of acrobats tossing each other backwards and forwards under the big top, until the disintegration of the limbs of one causes the proceedings to halt abruptly. In Il Duetto, slighter and more sinuous of line, a cellist and a lady opera singer slug out a trial by combat to the modernist music of Xenakis. Both films-pugnacious, clever, a touch sinister—share the economy and elegance that is the wit of the born cartoonist.

Their next film, Nocturna Artificialia: Those Who Desire Without End, wasn't to be made for another six years; but since the evolution of our film-makers is interesting in its own right I ought to say a word or two about the interim. Upon graduation they returned to America to set about earning their living-odd jobs waitering and cab-driving mixed with more congenial activity, such as poster work and book-jacket design, where they could find it. The goal not to be lost sight of, in the lean years, was a continual self-education. Waiting for their chance to arrive, the Quaijs immersed themselves in Arabic music and in the writings of Kafka and Céline, pushed their acquaintance further and deeper with the art of the Polish and East European

he Brothers Quaij and Keith Griffiths

<sup>\*</sup>Pronounced and alternatively spelt 'Quay'.

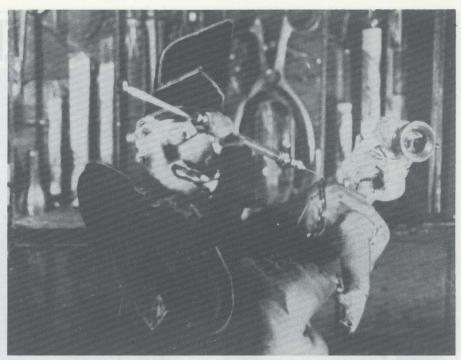
surrealists, Borowczyk, Lenica, Cieslewicz, Trnka, Skolimowski. Marvellous short trips to Poland, financed by their labours, put them in touch momentarily with the living tradition (or its remnants) at first hand.

In early 1977 a grant of \$3,000 from the National Endowment Fund for the purpose of studying Celtic mythology allowed the brothers to return to Europe. (The name Quaij, incidentally, is Manx: like everyone else, they were partly in search of their origins.) A short, by all accounts disastrous, trip round Wales and Scotland used up the bulk of the money. Moving to Holland and Belgium, they spent the rest of 1977 exposed to the melancholy atmosphere of the Low Countries, whose Spanish inheritance, with its residual flamboyance (observable in the architecture and carnivals), compounds so strangely with the haunted, misty, introverted spiritualism of Northern Europe. It was here, in contact with the paintings of Ensor and Bosch, and more especially with the Toone Marionette Theatre in Brussels, that they discovered the sinister beauty of masks, later to be put into effect in films like Punch and Judy and The Eternal Day of Michel de Ghelderode. And it was from Holland, that year, that they were recalled by a telegram from Keith Griffiths, deputy head of the British Film Institute's Production Department, telling them that an application for money to make a film in England had been successful.

Keith Griffiths now comes into the story. I should say something about him too, since his partnership and support, first as producer and later as full artistic collaborator, has been crucial to the success of 'Atelier Koninck', the name given to their collaborative enterprise. In fact Griffiths and the Quaijs were contemporaries at the Royal College, but in different departments, so that their acquaintance, though real, had always been at a distance. In the mid-1960s at Leicester College of Art, where he was studying industrial design, Griffiths had run an experimental theatre, putting on plays by the very Michel de Ghelderode ('forgotten' Flemish dramatist of the inter-war years) whose works the Quaij brothers discovered for themselves during their short stay in Belgium and Holland.

Restless and energetic, Griffiths had during the 70s been assimilating the skills of an administrator. First at Lincoln as films and arts officer, subsequently as film officer for Greater London Arts, and then as Peter Sainsbury's deputy at the BFI Production Department, he addressed himself to the business of bargaining and compromise, the in-fighting of contemporary arts politics. It was a characteristic piece of opportunism-in fact, the pigeonholing of money left over from Chris Petit's Radio On—that finally secured BFI funding for the Quaijs. From his distant perch he had been keeping a paternalistic eye on them. Without ado they accepted, and came to England to set up Nocturna Artificialia.

A puppet film, dense and cosmopoli-



Punch and Judy (1980): an adult history lesson.

or Duchamp. Brilliant work of archaeology and excavation.

Two recent films bring the tally up to date: Igor Stravinsky: The Paris Years Chez Pleyel (1983), a mixture of puppet and live animation; and Leos Janacek: Intimate Excursions, in tone and spirit something of a new departure. The sinister and exuberant here give way to gentle meditation, the voice of the narrator Witold Shejbal, reading from the diaries of the composer, infusing this film, it seems to me, with an unmistakable and commemorative humanism.

Igor Stravinsky and Leos Janacek were financed by Channel 4, indispensable patron and increasing rescuer of independent and small-scale film-making in Britain. But the slight awkwardness of the relationship is evident when one sees on television, as one did last August, a film such as Janacek. Television is an electronic medium, whereas the films of Atelier Koninck are geared, as it were, by love and conviction, to a tradition of artisan craftsmanship. They look backwards into the immediate past, rather than forward into the computer-based future. Koninck films have an almost aggressive need to be shown and appreciated 'traditionally'. And yet, given the current state of cinema distributiongiven the current state of public tastewhat cinemas in their senses would offer

commercialism, putting themselves wholeheartedly at the service of advertising, where at least their talents will be paid for. Craftsmanship of the sort I am talking about is tolerated in Western Europe provided that it remains anonymous, or accessory to a conventional

these films as their wares? Animation, as

everyone knows, is a ghetto. That is its

perennial difficulty. How much easier for

its practitioners to accept the bribe of

commercial project (as in the Special Effects departments at Pinewood).

None the less its autonomous claims

tan, Nocturna Artificialia extracts a strange lyricism from memories of the damp cobblestones of Brussels and Lodz, their haunted and ghostly churches, the clanking of their city trams. An elegant essay in alienation. Success of a sort-it won prizes in Finland-paved the way for their next film, Punch and Judy (1980), a freewheeling account of the assimilation of the Italian puppets into English folklore. The film benefited from the structure and order brought by the writer Griffiths. For the first time the collaborators mixed their elements: mime, masque, painting, archive footage, finally (most ingeniously) opera-puppet' highlights of a one-act drama by Harrison Birtwistle, first put on at Aldeburgh in 1968. 'Punch and Judy', then, as history lesson—but for adults rather than children. (It won the prize for the best foreign film at Annecy.) In A Fratricide/ Ein Brudermord (1981) the Quaijs dramatised a short story by Kafka. The humans of the original become scorpion-like puppets in a whirling five-minute battle-obvious comparison with Buñuel: the same entomological calmness and dispassionate scientific observation.

Next, in The Eternal Day of Michel de Ghelderode (1982), the collaborators succeeded in bringing out a rich and sardonic humour lurking at the edge of the playwright's macabre, death-obsessed imagination. The monotony that occasionally attaches to avant-garde theatre is avoided by the deft compression of the extracts from de Ghelderode's plays, the aim throughout being allusive homage rather than literal transcription. Poetic archive footage of high quality was incorporated, showing the artist in old age walking the streets of his 'quartier' in Brussels, pausing to talk to craftsmen in their workshop; finally, sitting brooding in his object-crammed study. In the evening of his life, the gaunt ironic face of a bourgeois recluse—rather like Burroughs



Igor Stravinsky: The Paris Years Chez Pleyel (1983): the 'mechanical' phenomenon of modernism.



The Eternal Day of Michel de Ghelderode (1982): allusive homage.

should occasionally be restated without recourse to special pleading. Animation's claim to attention (for convenience I include both puppet and line-drawing under the same general heading) lies, of course, in the freedom it gives to the imagination. Beneath the sober rationalism of one's everyday behaviour there lurks in all of us a seething, kinetic substratum of fantasy-vivid, amoral, anarchic and colourfully allusive. More than any other art form one can think of (a true invention of the twentieth century), animation manages to lock into this secret hidden life, bodying it forth in formal exuberance. Dreaming, eventually, is a moral as well as an aesthetic freedom: another way of saying that it is too important not to become a subject for art. Film is the oneiric medium par excellence. And animation, as it were, doubly so.

Why then is it so underestimated? One would be tempted to be amazed at the formal solemnity with which critics probe the psychoanalytic depths of selected

feature films, while ignoring altogether the much more obvious affinity to the Unconscious that lies in the art of the animated film-maker. Perhaps this is the answer one is looking for. The wit of the cartoon dispenses with the need to interpret it. In a radical sense, one can never tell, with these works of puppet and line, how far they are shallow or profound. While an avant-garde feature film will speak of Desire, the animator will exuberantly exemplify it.

A few examples seem called for. Among the British contingent at last year's London Film Festival, the films most truly the work of an artist were to be found, in my opinion, in the section set aside for animation. Why did one find them so pleasing? They were witty, they were short, they were unpretentious. Among other qualities, their sophistication about culture was striking—especially the culture of painting. Brigitte Hartley, of the London College of Printing, had a small film called *Dada* that seemed to my (admittedly inexpert) eye to capture with

genius the light-hearted anarchism, the sheer liberated exaltation, of the extraordinary moment early in the century when it was impossible to tell whether painting was reborn or destroyed. Similarly, in Taking a Line for a Walk: Homage to the Work of Paul Klee, by Lesley Keen and Donald Holwill, the homage is genuine in direct relation to its playfulness, and its freedom from academic pomposity. The unfreezing of the static line into the movement it had always seemed to crave says more about Klee's essential wit and purpose than pages of Tate Gallery catalogues. A similar carefreeness, mixed with evident understanding of the subject, is apparent in New Frontier, a superior rock promo by Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel, whose homage to Picasso's 'Musicians' (1934) consists in animating the jagged edges of its figures and filling its silence with music. All three examples miraculously get modernism right. They grasp it, that is to say, as style, and remain ironical and sceptical about its loftier philosophic ambitions.

Igor Stravinsky: The Paris Years Chez Pleyel has the same désinvolture. The respect paid by Griffiths and the Quaij brothers to the revered composer of Le Sacre du Printemps is achieved by mischievous irony-shared equally between Stravinsky himself and his companions of the cast, Cocteau and Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky, in particular, is a splendid creation of fantasy. Kitted out in a costume of newspaper headlines, and booming his telegraphic poems through a megaphone, he stands in the film as supreme grotesque example of the poet as attitudinising rebel. One had to wait to see Mayakovsky portrayed as a puppet to appreciate the extent to which modernism itself, in the heroic inter-war period, was a profoundly 'mechanical' phenomenon.

Animation itself, a more important point, comes out of the aesthetic of modern art, and should therefore be well placed to comment on it. Cubism, vorticism, futurism were all in their essence, it seems to me, movements of satire. seeking provocatively to deny the superiority of the human species to other forms of animal enterprise. The obvious way to do this was to insist that man was an animal-and if not an animal, an automaton. Hence, in Stravinsky, the passion for precision (symbolised in the Pleyel film by the use of mechanical piano). The unearthly syncopations of his music for ballet were designed to encroach on the dancer's freedom of interpretation, thus to imply that real freedom lies in submission to determinism. The masks of de Ghelderode, similarly, can be seen as so many ruses put on to avoid assuming the responsibility of an individual fate (and with it the certainty of extinction). To become a mere mechanism is to escape from the laws of mortality. Escape into what, one might ask. The piercing, mocking dissonances of the modern operatic score (in composers like Penderecki and Birtwistle) have the effect of dislodging the harmony of song from its attachment to

the human voice, pushing it over instead towards the twittering of animals and birds. In its essence, one concludes, it is a world of automatic compulsion that reigns in the films of the Quaij brothers. The twitchings of love become indistinguishably fused with the stabs of the murderer, and the lunges of beasts of prey. The gestures of humans are 'placed', in the last resort, by a similarity to the gestures of animals.

It is this vigour in the films of Atelier Koninck that strikes one as their impressive characteristic. Punch and Judy takes the ancient puppets and, as it were, shudders them back into life: shakes them with the frenzied singlemindedness that Punch himself, in the days of his prime, was accustomed to mete out on his victims. 'New life in old bones' might be the motto of this film about death. 'They have pulled out my Italian teeth one by one—fed me on saccharine to sweeten my homicide.' The film rummages in the origins of the myth to uncover, once more, the bitterness of its anti-bourgeois satire. As, in sweat-filled sleep, there is no hard and fast dividing line between the register of a dream and the register of a nightmare, but the one turns imperceptibly into the other, so the object of the film seems to have been to take the unexceptionable, anodyne, daylight gestures of Punch and infuse them with their old night-time horror. Two horrific murders, with quill and syringe, effect the translation from seaside cabinet booth to the cabinet of Freud or

Caligari. And along with Punch—struggling, protesting and snarling—the whole party of dogs, wives, crocodiles, devils and hangmen.

On the other hand, it is not quite so easy. Any serious knowledge of animals (such knowledge as the artist is forced to pick up in order to render their movements with accuracy) exposes the researcher to the fact of their character humour. Punch was humorous—and happily will continue to remain so. It is not for nothing that so many books for children are illustrated by animal precepts. Great poets know instinctively, and demonstrate soundly, that a knowledge of animals-and of birds and insects-is the child's education in tenderness. I don't want to force Griffiths and the Quaijs into a humanist mould uncongenial to their characteron the contrary, I hope the collaboration retains its darkness and 'bite', as a mysterious and private quality beyond the reach of an intruding critical exegesisbut I can't forbear to point to a final ambiguity that lies in the midst of their

Just as the crawling caterpillar turns into the iridescent butterfly, beauty and tenderness, unbidden and unexpected, hover at the edges of satire. Satire is incomplete unless it is infused with a countervailing sense of the wonderful. Londoners were privileged last year to see at special exhibitions the work of two great poet animators, predecessors to Atelier Koninck. In the films of Ladislaw

Starevicz (1882–1965) one glimpsed precisely this vital dual perspective about the operation of animals and puppets. On the one hand his scurrying ants and beetles, with their absurd epic battles and adulterous love affairs, are a mockery of bourgeois human enterprise. On the other hand ... on the other hand, marvellous to turn it all round and see in these films not the disparagement of the human heart, but the extension of the human heart to cover and comprehend all forms of creation, in their joys and sorrows and catastrophes.

A similarly delicate universalism informed the work of the other great animator on show, the Russian artist Yuri Norstein. Even more than Starevicz, perhaps, he is interested in finding and establishing the true and ancient affections that link the animal and human worlds in bonds of obligation and friendship. The recognition of this mutual interdependence, it seems to me, is the acme of wisdom; how pleasing to see it exemplified in the 'intimate excursions' of Janacek. Leaf-winged dragonflies, in this latest film, hover gently round the body of the sleeping composer. Foxes and grasshoppers flit to and fro in his dreams, summoned by memory from the forests of his native Moravia. Harmony reigns in

For the rest, then, one looks forward to future work from Atelier Koninck, in which the highest standards of artisan craftsmanship mix penetrating satirical realism with older, gentler douceurs.

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'Richard, Richard, we must be very, very careful crossing the Kurfürstendamm. I was born in this horrible city, but I don't want to die here.' And indeed, on 5 March 1896, Charlotte Henrietta Eisner was born not far from the Ku-damm in the fashionable Tiergarten area of Berlin. When she was a young girl, her father wouldn't let her go near the Kurfürstendamm: if it is now the centre of West Berlin, it was then the vice centre of all Berlin, the street down which Sally Bowles used to walk with Herr Issyvoo.

Lotte was born into a well-to-do Jewish family that had converted to Protestantism and, as she told me, she never particularly thought of herself as Jewish. Others were to take care of that later. She studied archaeology and art history and wrote her PhD dissertation in 1924 on 'The Images on Greek Vases'. Two years later she began to write articles, book reviews and interviews for the Literarisches Welt. In 1927, she joined the staff of Film Kurier, a cinema and theatre daily newspaper, for which she reviewed both plays and films.

Then came 1933 and, more prescient than many, Lotte realised it was time to leave. Her brother assured her that all this 'Nazi nonsense' would soon blow over. She knew better, and she told him, 'I'm leaving now, but with all my books and belongings. One day you'll leave, too, but you'll only be able to take out an overnight bag.' Sure enough, one day in 1938 there was a knock on Lotte's door in Paris and there was her brother-with a small suitcase. She chose Paris because her sister had married a Frenchman. Eugène van der Meersch, so she would not be entirely alone in her exile. Although, as she cryptically told me, 'I didn't get on with my sister. She played

Once in Paris, she made her living writing for a German-language Czech publication called Internationale Film Schau-until Hitler invaded Prague. She became for a time the Paris correspondent of World Film News, the periodical of the British documentary film movement. Meanwhile, something important had happened: in 1934, she had read in the French trade weekly La Cinématographie Française (now defunct) that two young men, Henri Langlois and Georges Franju, had set about saving silent films from destruction. That caught her interest because she had been brought up on silent films, and for her those films had an atmosphere, a certain mystery, even, which was different from that of the sound film. So she wrote to the magazine, and arranged a rendezvous with the two men at the Café Wepler, Place de Clichy: each of them was to carry a copy of the Cinémato (as it was called) under his (or her) arm. Langlois was only twenty years old, half Lotte's age, but the three of them hit it off immediately, and although she did not accompany them in their search for prints she did help them sort and classify stills, programmes, posters and scripts.

When the war came, like all Germans—Nazi or anti-Nazi—she was interned in the camp at Gurs in the Pyrenees. Because her brother-in-law was a colonel in the French army, she got out after three months; but as a result of the inadequate rations, she told me, she left behind four teeth-victims of malnutrition. Later she found her way to Montpellier in the Unoccupied Zone, where Langlois came to visit her from time to time. When he heard that the Germans were about to cross the demarcation line between Occupied and Unoccupied France, he wrote to her to leave. By the time she got the letter, however, it was too late: the Germans were already in Montpellier. And her money was all gone. She happened to meet a young man she had known in Berlin, who told her to go to the local rabbi for help. But since she had been brought up as a Protestant, she felt foolish going to see a rabbi. What could she say to him? Another friend suggested that she get in touch with Pastor Exbrayat, a Protestant minister, who found her 'an interesting case' and gave her some money. But she soon realised she would have to move on. Langlois had suggested Nice, but she preferred to hole up in a smaller town. She was right in her instincts: a few weeks later, the German troops took over

Under the *nom de guerre* of Louise Escoffier, and with the help of Exbrayat, she got a job cooking in a girls' school. That didn't work out; she was, in spite of her choice of alias, not a good cook, and when she was sacked, she went to Figeac, where she was taken in by the aunt of Georges Sadoul, the film critic and historian. She spent the rest of the Occupation there, taking time out only to visit the nearby Château de Beduers, where Langlois had stored some films: she felt she must check on their condition.

#### **Sleeping Cars**

When the war ended, she was fetched by Langlois, and now that the Cinémathèque Française was receiving a government subsidy and had a permanent home, she became its Curator-in-Chief, a job she held for thirty years. As Langlois would always say, two-thirds of the objects (costumes, sets, maquettes, etc) in the Museum of the Cinema were obtained by Lotte. She was also Langlois' 'Madonna of the Sleeping Cars', for often it was she who, to avoid officialdom and paperwork, would transport films-even nitrate prints-under her sleeping-car berth from one country to another. And she would either precede or accompany Langlois on his visits to the Cannes, Berlin and Venice Film Festivals.

But unlike Mary Meerson and Langlois himself, Lotte Eisner had a professional life outside the Cinémathèque. In 1948 she published an important article on the German films of Fritz Lang in the Penguin Film Review. Then in 1952 appeared the work that was to make her famous: L'Ecran Demoniaque (The Haunted Screen). It has been called by many critics perhaps the finest single book of film criticism, and that may well be true. Unlike Siegfried Kracauer, who specialised in 20/20 hindsight and ex

post facto judgments, Lotte Eisner knew that Caligari led to more than Hitler. Equally important was her knowledge of the German theatre, which she related to the development of films. Expressionism, yes, of course, but she also made us see the importance of Kammerspiel, a style of chamber acting developed by Max Reinhardt; she explained the importance of the German Stimmung (atmosphere, mood); she she was the first to insist on the unique quality of Louise Brooks, whom she first met on the set of Diary of a Lost Girl poring over a volume of Schopenhauer. Aha, she thought, this is Pabst's idea to make everyone think his American discovery is an intellectual. Then she discovered that Louise Brooks was indeed an intellectual. The two women didn't see each other for years, but when Louise Brooks came to Paris for her triumphant retrospective in 1958, she spent most of her time there with Lotte.

Her definitive study of Murnau appeared first in Paris in 1964, and then in a revised and enlarged edition in London in 1973. The last book she published was Fritz Lang (London, 1976; New York, 1977). As she noted in her preface, it was more difficult for her to write about Lang than about Murnau because she had never actually met Murnau (he left Germany in 1927). And, as she said, 'For my own part, I do not claim to have produced a definitive study.' The book is soon to be published in its original French. How she found time to write these books while working more than full time for the Cinémathèque is a mystery. She retired in 1975—at the age of 79and then only because she had had her first heart attack. Until then, she was constantly enriching the collection with new films, scripts, costumes, artefacts. It was she who was able to persuade the 80-year-old art director Hermann Warm to supervise the reconstruction—by his sculptor, Walter Schultze original Mittendorff-of the robot from Metropolis for the new Museum of the Cinema.

But what was most amazing-and laudable-about Lotte was that, although she was essentially a film historian, a film archaeologist, even, she never lost interest in contemporary cinema, particularly German cinema. She may have 'hated' Berlin, and indeed, it was always somewhat embarrassing being there with her, because she would hiss—in English, to be sure, but that language is not unknown there—'Look at those faces. They must have been Nazis. I'm sure of it.' And people would understand, would turn round, would stare. She loved Berlin, too, especially its own brand of humour. One of the funniest-and most chillingexamples was the story she told me of a middle-aged Jew who took a taxi from Tempelhof airport into town. On the way, he kept commenting, in perfect German and even with a Berlin accent, on how this building had disappeared, how that street had changed. Finally, the driver, a man of the same age, turned to his passenger, and said, 'I guess you haven't been here for a while.' 'Not since 1933,' replied the Jew a little ostentatiously. 'Hmm,' said the driver, 'Well, you didn't miss much.'

Lotte was always able to distinguish between Nazis and Germans, and she was one of the first to recognise the existence in the 1960s of a new German cinema; to hail Werner Herzog, in particular, as a worthy successor to the German cinema of her time. Her only blind spot was Leni Riefenstahl, whom she loathed, but whose films she couldn't bring herself to dismiss. She used to pretend to think that anything that was good about them must have been due to the influence of the editor Walter Ruttmann, or the genius of the cameraman Hans Ertl. Her appreciation of the younger German film directors was much appreciated by them, and it is well known that when Lotte was ill a few years ago Werner Herzog set off in the dead of winter to walk from Munich to Paris in the hope that somehow this would help Lotte recover. And, for whatever reason, she did recover.

#### Nostalgia

Lotte Eisner had taken French nationality in 1952, but when she died in the suburbs of Paris on 25 November 1983, a friend who was in Cologne at the time told me that her death was one of the chief items on the 11 pm West German television news programme, a fact that I somehow feel would have pleased her enormously. Like many 'assimilated' German Jews she was as much (if not more) German than Jewish. 'I wrote my books out of longing for German culture and nostalgia for the 1920s,' she said in 1982, when she received the first Helmut Käutner prize endowed by the city of Düsseldorf.

When I last saw her in her flat in Neuilly (paid for by the 'reparations' the German government made for her having been obliged to leave Germany), she was noticeably fading, but she was working away on a book of memoirs, helped by Werner Herzog's wife Maartje. I hope enough had been written for it to be published one day.

François Truffaut once described Lotte as the 'angel' of the Cinémathèque; she may have been an angel, but she was no saint. She could be very witty indeed at the expense of those she considered unworthy, and she had high standards. Her death, in the same month as that of Herman G. Weinberg in New York, marks the end of an era, of a certain kind of film historian who had seen the great silent classics as they came out. And she had one other, supremely rare distinction. Lotte was small, frail, yet indomitable. She had about her a dignity born of (justified) intellectual and moral selfconfidence that made her the one person whom Henri Langlois, known for his towering rages, never yelled at, never even raised his voice to. Like Hannah Arendt, who had also been interned at Gurs, she possessed that greatest of qualities, what Arendt called 'moral taste'.

To have met Lotte Eisner was a privilege; to have known her was to have known a representative of the best of German intelligence, wit and warmth.

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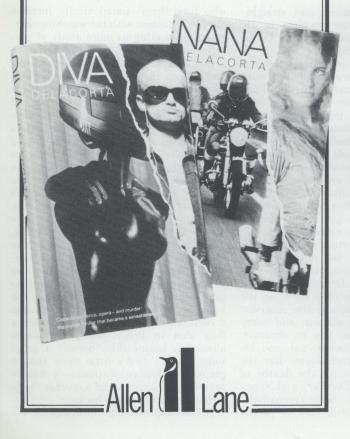
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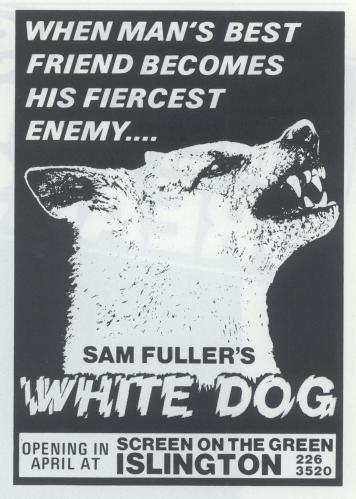
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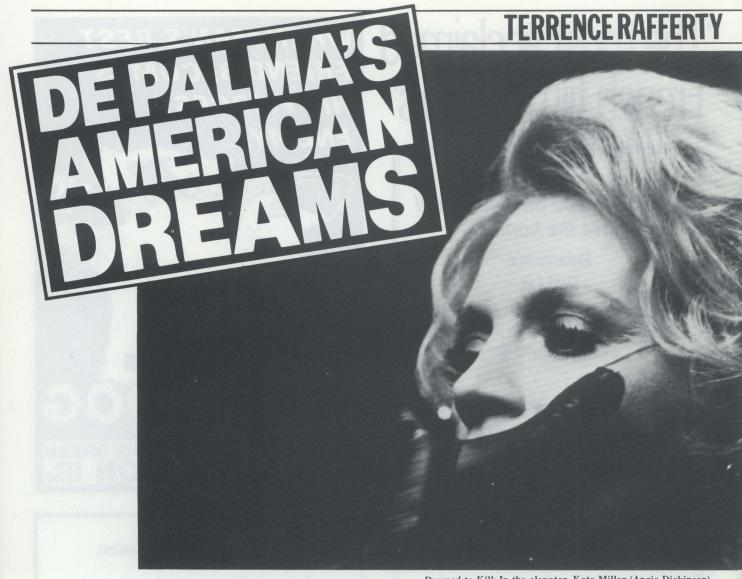
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Dressed to Kill: In the elevator, Kate Miller (Angie Dickinson).

Brian De Palma, like all good surrealists, is happier with knives and razors than with guns. He uses the intimate weapons of our nightmares—the ones that require the killer to stalk his victim, to close in, to feel, finally, the warmth of the victim's blood on his own handswith poetic force. They hover, they fly, they gleam like wedding rings. The instruments of death so dominate De Palma's films that they become, like Buñuel's razor, important structural elements in the works. The structure of Blow Out, for instance, is the narrowing circle of the garrotte. And De Palma's new gangster movie, Scarface, is as distant, as impersonal, as linear as a gunshot-which is, perhaps, why it seems such a strange movie for him to have

With Scarface, De Palma is taking his shot at simplicity: telling a 'classic' story straight through, with no split screens or 360° pans, no dream sequences, no elaborate lyrical set-pieces, and up to a point he succeeds. This is an efficient gangster picture, a good, nasty entertainment. It's probably a conscious departure: his previous film, Blow Out, is in every sense a closed circle, the completion and perfection of all his work. It's no wonder that he's followed the complex, personal Blow

Out with this distanced and straightforward narrative—the problem is, De Palma has no simplicity in him. Oliver Stone's script for Scarface is a fairly schematic updating of the Hawks and Hecht original, a rise-and-fall story with few contemporary twists-Tony Camonte, the Italian immigrant who makes his fortune in bootleg liquor, becomes Tony Montana, a Cuban exile who strikes it rich dealing cocaine-and De Palma serves it well. Almost too well. He carries his Hollywood-style impersonality so far that it creates a kind of tension, an unease that transcends the predictable, classic line of the scenario. The movie seems to give off a sinister, mechanical buzz, like a chainsaw.

De Palma has certainly made audiences uneasy before, but never in quite this way. The most unnerving sequences in Carrie, The Fury, Dressed to Kill and Blow Out depend for their effect on the presence of a helpless, sensitive observer: every crime has its witness, and every nightmare, of course, has its dreamer. Every film has its viewer, too, and De Palma's distancing techniques—like the slow motion he uses for the deaths of Carrie Snodgress in The Fury and Nancy Allen in Blow Out, both sympathetic characters killed in full view of people

who love them—paradoxically increase our identification with the watching characters by making us more aware of ourselves as spectators.

But Scarface's violence is shot realistically, even in the film's most shocking (by now infamous) scene, in which Tony Montana, double-crossed by a couple of South American drug dealers, is forced to watch his friend dismembered with a chainsaw in the bathroom of a squalid Miami hotel. De Palma directs the scene for maximum shock, emphasising the brutal confinement of the space, the shudder that runs through the killer's body when the chainsaw starts up, the spray of blood on Montana's face and clothes, and the constant, echoing, nerve-destroying noise; but here the shock isn't deepened by Montana's reaction. When we see Montana's face, we see some fear and a lot of rage, but no grief; when he gets his revenge on the killer, a couple of minutes later, it's just a swift, casual shooting on the street, a long shot in bright sunlight. This is alienated, businesslike horror: a gruesome murder that's little more than a gratuitous display of power-a killer's proud performance—and a revenge that's only a balancing of the books.

It's an impressive performance by the

director, too, in a manner that he sustains throughout the picture. Nothing else in Scarface approaches the savagery of this early scene, but the chilling tone of emotional neutrality persists. Scarface could, perhaps, be read as a nightmare of freewheeling, American-style capitalismexcept there's no dreamer here, no one to register the appalling images, to give them their true emotional weight. We never get any closer to Tony Montana than we do in his first scene-his face held in close-up, the camera moving around him, catching every angle of his face as he tries to lie his way past the immigration officials. When De Palma pulls back from his protagonist, he pulls back for good. Tony's hard cunning is all we need to see; the rest is violence.

In a sense, Scarface is De Palma's first fully American movie: just as he once flooded lurid little horror numbers like Carrie and The Fury with elegant poetic effects, here he works against the grain of this big, respectable production by telling his story in the mean, harsh, disreputable style of a B-movie exposéthe sort of work a Phil Karlson might have done in the 50s, complete with stock-footage prologue explaining the background of the 'shocking' social problem. This certainly isn't homage—De Palma is, of his generation of American film-makers, by far the least reverent of the Hollywood past-but something closer to parody. It's De Palma's imitation of a Hollywood hack, performed with such ferocity that it seems to strip the style bare.

The film is all surfaces, and none of them shine: De Palma seems to have turned the Florida sunlight into a kind of cold fluorescence. But this rigorous superficiality gives the film a real, though perilous, coherence. The style combines with other elements of the work-Montana's machismo; the notorious overuse of the four-letter word for sexual intercourse; the presence of all that bright, white, neutral-looking powder, that provides its user with the illusion of mastery; the zombie-like remoteness of Montana's blonde wife-to produce a film that's essentially a bitter dirty joke about the limits of capitalist ambition: you grow, you expand, you become, as a businessman, something hard and unyielding; and yet you can't get in very far, you keep butting up against the harder surfaces of the culture. (Even in a purely geographical sense, Montana hasn't penetrated very deeply in American society-just the few hundred miles from Cuba to Florida.) The film's brightness and its wilful opacity define its distance both from the original Scarface, whose rich nocturnal images carry the sense of dark secrets discovered, and from De Palma's earlier work, which at its best seems to be breaking right through into our dreams: everything in this Scarface seems to be happening in the open, as if there were no crimes left so horrible that they need to be hidden.

In the end, Tony Montana, high on

cocaine and shooting it out with a Bolivian hit squad, seems to explode, firing his bazooka-like machine gun into the heart of his own mansion. The surfaces crumble, the vast central hall fills with smoke and blood, bodies and debris, as if Montana's shell-his body, his property-were destroying itself from within, a hard object finally burst from all that's been put into it. Montana's death, in smoky slow motion, the same dying gestures seen from several angles, is shot like the death of Childress, the corporate monster with the dead arm who blows up at the end of The Fury, destroyed by the gaze of Gillian, that film's sensitive observer. Scarface's protagonist seems to have been destroyed by the cold fury of the camera itself, whose greed for bright things has, after nearly three hours, reached the point of surfeit—the point at which it's alienated enough from its own objects that it's capable, at last, of destroying them.

De Palma himself is walking a fine line between alienation and identification in *Scarface*. As a hired director, he has to deliver the goods—a huge load of blood, sex, coke, noise, vulgarity, big cars, and enough social background to set off Al Pacino's star performance. It's an assignment that puts him in the position of having to identify with his protagonist, who's carrying the same kind of serious weight. Yet the scenario is critical, even contemptuous, of Montana, and he's not the sort of character that De Palma has been sympathetic towards in his past work.

His solution is, in a sense, a variant of the helpless observer motif of his other films: he uses his own distance from the material as a means of identifying himself with his alienated, inhuman hero, conceives both his own activity and Tony Montana's as exercises in consumption

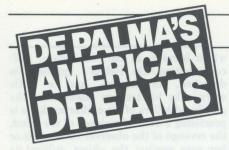
The Fury: Impulses out of control, Kirk Douglas and Amy Irving.

which become, in the end, acts of selfconsumption. De Palma's approach is detached, intellectual, and a little scary—like his teenage telekinetics, the privileged killers of his earlier work, he is practising a kind of violence of the mind, the revenge of the observer turning his or her gaze against the object, willing its destruction from a point beyond horror and beyond despair. De Palma has always been shocking, has always skirted the edges of exploitation, but with a redeeming self-consciousness; the shock of Scarface, compared to his previous films, is that the director seems not to want to distinguish it at all from its genre.

Neither Carrie nor The Fury has a plot that would distinguish it from the general run of horror exploitation pictures-Carrie's is crude and serviceable, The Fury's crude and nearly nonsensicalbut the films are powerful and terrifying in a way that exploitation films never are. The horror in these films has an insinuating, sensuous quality that's like an extreme form of adolescent selfconsciousness, an awareness of both emotions and physical sensations that's exhilarating, fragmented, painfully sharp. The young heroine of *The Fury* is desperate to understand her powers and desperately afraid of them: when she's having one of her visions, she makes whoever is near her bleed, as if her mind were gripping the world too hard.

Both films generate horror from nightmarish exaggerations of the experience of adolescence: the feeling that your impulses have gone out of control, that even your own body is alien, even hostile; the powerful sense of isolation, of exclusion from the secrets of the great, organised, social world; the yearning for connection that sometimes takes the form of furtive, inexpressible love, the kind of love that waits and watches, storing images of its object in the mind. In *The Fury*, De Palma's vision of teenage love is stylised





and almost comically pure. Gillian feels attracted to a boy she's never met, whom she knows only through her visions, and tracks down the young psychic because she thinks he's the only one who could possibly understand her. There isn't a horror effect in either picture that isn't based on some characteristic of the adolescent consciousness. In this sense, De Palma is a true exploitation film-maker: he doesn't merely represent his teenage 'target audience' on screen, just to have victims whom his viewers can identify with—he exploits his audience in a more intimate and more serious way, using their fears, their locked-in desires and their potent fantasies as the substance and the unifying sensibility of the films.

Both pictures are variations on the theme of the sensitive loner, but Carrie keeps everything linked to its satiric view of an American high school, while the more purely oneiric The Fury seems to be floating somewhere above our heads, like the boy psychic Robin in his final scenes. It takes the petty, local betrayals of Carrie beyond high school into the vast, dark world outside, where a gifted kid isn't just a joke, but is a valuable commodity, a weapon to be wielded by an obscure 'company'. Although it's not at all explicit, The Fury is in some sense an allegory of co-opted genius. Gillian's piercing talents are a burden to her in her conventional high school; when she moves to an institute for psychic research, where she's treated as an individual and surrounded by sympathetic mentors, her powers begin to develop into something controllable and even pleasurable—it's nearly a parody of the university experience, the delirious rush of freedom, ease and intellectual power that gives bright kids the feeling of being home at last. But her visions of Robin, who has recently been in the same position, are disquieting, a look at her own future that's like a nightmare of being recruited by a corporation: Robin has been kidnapped by the 'company' (the CIA or something like it), who seem to be honing him as an instrument, shaving away the edges of his character-his moral sense, his love for his father, his ability to enjoy his own extraordinary vision—until, by the time Gillian and his father catch up with him, he's no more than a hard, gleaming blade of malice.

The rich suggestiveness of *The Fury* isn't inherent in its story; it comes out of the disproportionate visual and emotional intensity of the horror scenes. The movie is as determined to shock as any exploitation picture (and as indifferent to narrative logic), but the horror setpieces are so scrupulously designed, building on each other with echoing motifs, that they have an obsessional quality more suggestive of surrealist dream research than of B-movie market research.

Having done a high-speed car chase early in the film, De Palma uses an out-of-control car to kill Hester, Gillian's sympathetic teacher at the institute. Hester's head smashes a windshield, the glass motif recalling both the scene in which Gillian causes another teacher to bleed and her blood to stain a glass table, and Gillian's visions of Robin crashing through a window in his attempt to escape from the institute. Later on, Robin sends a carnival ride full of Arab

Carrie: The high school prom, an adolescent nightmare.



tourists (who remind him of the terrorists in the opening scene, who he believes have killed his father) spinning out of control; one of the cars detaches itself and shatters the plate-glass window of a restaurant. Near the end, he finishes off the woman who-on Childress' ordershas become his lover, by lifting her in the air (telekinetically) and whirling her faster and faster until her body is drained of blood. The exsanguination is also a step in a formal progression of blood scenes: from the trifling nosebleed that Gillian induces in one of her high school classmates, to the teacher's blood gushing on the breakfast table, to this-and beyond, to the explosive end of Childress. The Fury's narrative is delirious, out of control, but its horror is rigorous, with the unexpected formal correspondence of a collage.

As the director of Carrie and The Fury, films he didn't write, De Palma seems to be discovering his themes through his technique: staging scenes of remotecontrol violence requires, on the technical level, some consideration of the dialectics of distance and intimacy, of action and reaction, an awareness of the camera's role as both a passive recorder of images and an active instrument of shock. His next two big-budget films, Dressed to Kill and Blow Out, both scripted by De Palma, make these considerations explicit by transforming the telekinetics, the sensitive human recording devices of the earlier films, into the technological whiz kids played by Keith Gordon in Dressed to Kill and John Travolta in Blow Out. These two pictures, like Carrie and The Fury, are a linked pair—the second is, again, darker, more dreamlike, more convoluted as narrative, and more despairing.

Dressed to Kill is, appropriately, something of a technical exercise itself: an essay on the tracking shot, framed by a pair of dreams. Its major sequences are all variations on the idea of surveillance, and they all turn out to be elaborate little jokes on the audience's belief that it has been 'following' the action; in this flashy, shameless thriller of sexual anxiety, the audience is always taken from behind.

The most brilliant sequence, a museum pick-up/chase scene involving victim-tobe Kate Miller (Angie Dickinson) and an attractive stranger, alternates, to the accelerating rhythm of Kate's clicking heels, close-ups of Kate with subjective tracks from her point of view as she wanders through the maze-like galleries, the stranger occasionally popping into view from behind a partition. The suspense of the sequence—since there are no shots from his point of view—is in our confusion about where the characters are in relation to each other, and our uncertainty (perhaps Kate Miller's as well) about who's following whom. Just when the chase appears over and Kate is leaving the museum, the stranger pops up again, dangling her lost glove from the window of a cab, and as Kate moves gratefully towards him, a blonde in a black coat, whose presence hasn't been signalled at all, passes behind her and picks up her other discarded glove.

A later sequence, a subway chase involving Liz Blake (Nancy Allen), the hooker who's the only witness to Kate's murder, is shot in a more objective style. We've seen the killer following her, sometimes from her point of view and sometimes not, and the camera tracks from angles that couldn't possibly be her pursuer's, such as from outside the windows of the speeding train. But again it keeps us in the dark about just where her pursuer is, and again it produces multiple surprises at the end: the killer suddenly appears behind Liz, and Kate Miller's son turns up out of nowhere, behind the killer. There are many more instances of this sort of trickery, in which we are encouraged to follow the camera's tracks, to read the action 'correctly' in terms of conventional film grammar, only to find that we have assumed too much and left ourselves wide open to attack from somewhere else.

De Palma is so confident in this picture, and so determined to show us the errors of our perceptions, that he can repeat an effect and fool us the second time, too. In the opening sequence, we're startled first when an apparently subjective track into the Millers' bathroom and a shot of a man shaving lead us to believe that whatever threatens the showering Kate Miller will come from in front of her, until she's grabbed abruptly from behind; and second, when the assault turns out to have been a dream. And then he does it again in the final sequence, which begins with the lunatic Elliott's escape from the hospital, a scene shot so expressionistically that we know this must be a dream, then proceeds to a recapitulation of the opening scene (this time with Liz Blake in the shower) which builds suspense so skilfully that we doubt, then forget, that we're in a dream—despite the scene's resemblance to the earlier one, and despite the presence in nearly every shot of a brilliant, sourceless point of light in the middle of. the frame (an echo of Kate Miller's gleaming wedding ring in the first dream), sometimes reflecting on a doorknob or a razor, sometimes shining inexplicably from outside the window. And yet again—this time with sleightof-hand cutting, a mirror, and a pair of shoes—he convinces us that we know just where the killer is, and produces him from behind.

This relentless demonstration that we shouldn't trust what we see is reinforced by this film's observer figure, the teenage scientist Peter Miller (who, by all accounts, is a near version of the director's adolescent self), whose amateur surveillance—bugging, a stop-motion camera set up outside Elliott's office—not only don't lead him to the truth, but lead to a misconstruction of reality that nearly gets Liz killed, in a scene that makes Peter an appalled spectator on the

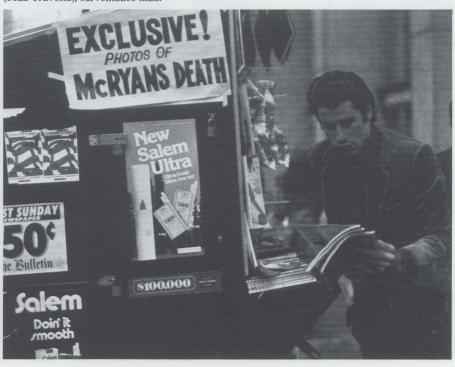
other side of a barred window. The worst doesn't happen here; De Palma saves that for Jack Terry, the grown-up whiz kid who's the hero of his next film. Dressed to Kill is an elegant conjuring trick, but it's just a warm-up for the darker magic of Blow Out.

It's easy to believe in De Palma's reported teenage fascination with technology: his meanings, in an individual film, are most often an extension of his technical means; and his body of work, up to *Blow Out*, has an unusually systematic progression, like a series of experiments. He treats both his own previous works and the works of others (especially Hitchcock's), as research to be built upon, suggestive hypotheses to be tested and then surpassed. *Blow Out* looks like a conscious summation of De Palma's themes and techniques.

He draws his principal collaborators actors John Travolta, Nancy Allen, John Lithgow and Dennis Franz, cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, editor Paul Hirsch, composer Pino Donaggio-from his earlier films; lays out his full array of technical tricks—360° pans, elaborate tracking shots, split screens, slow motion; deploys all his usual themes and visual motifs-surveillance, political and sexual paranoia, doomed love, the helpless observer, blood and breaking glass; places at its centre his autobiographical character, the technology whiz. He introduces the subject of film-making itself (and even includes a parody of his own work); takes another crack (after the failure of the too slavishly imitative Obsession) at capturing the dreamlike romantic horror of Vertigo. And he places it all in the narrative context of an assassination conspiracy plot that draws elements from the John Kennedy assassination, Ted Kennedy's Chappaquiddick scandal, the Watergate coverup, and urban mass murderers such as New York's 'Son of Sam' and San Francisco's 'Zebra' killer, all the most powerful images of violence and corruption from the past twenty years of American history, and in the visual context of a scrupulously maintained colour scheme of red, white and blue. What De Palma was working toward all along, it seems, was this thrillerised autobiography of an American film-maker.

The presence of an adult, rather than a teenager, at the centre of the film is the key to Blow Out's form and to its meaning. Carrie and The Fury were about people experiencing events with a first-time intensity, and were structured as series of shocks, progressions from innocence to cruel knowledge; the shocks are muted here, and deeper, and the structure is circular, because Blow Out's subject is the horror of repetition, the adult experience of having seen and heard it all before, events playing and replaying in our minds in an endless loop. The film means to have this effect on the viewer's memory, to send us circling back into the past at every point, both the past outside the film—The Fury and Dressed to Kill, Vertigo and Blow-up, the Kennedy assassination and Watergate, even the revolutionary history of America (the action takes place in Philadelphia during an historical celebration called 'Liberty Day')-and the past within the film as well. Blow Out ends where it began, in a screening room, and with the same piece of film, a shower murder from the trashy slasher movie Coed Frenzy; the sounds we hear in the film's key scenes—gun shots, footsteps, breaking glass, thunderous fireworksare the same taped sounds that Jack Terry is collecting and labelling in the

Blow Out: Jack Terry (John Travolta), surveillance man.





credit sequence; and Jack's pursuit of the killer of a presidential candidate ends in a re-enactment of the central trauma of his life, a botched surveillance operation that causes his confederate's death. Visually, the film is all circles: Jack's spinning reels of tape; the killer's garrotte.

Jack Terry's story describes an arc from detachment to involvement and back again—back to something far beyond detachment, an anaesthetised professionalism. His art as a movie sound recordist allows him a certain distance: not only can he pick up sounds from far away, he picks them up dissociated from the images they will accompany on the screen. But when he hears, and records, the blow out that killed Governor McRyan, he begins to close the gap: by playing the tape again and again; by

becoming involved with Sally, the other witness; and finally by attempting to put sound and image together. He makes a flip book out of a series of cut-out magazine photos of the crash, then animates the sequence, then synchronises his tape to the animation—all the while neglecting his work on *Coed Frenzy*—and these scenes reach back, exhilaratingly, into the history of film: this jaded exploitation film-maker is recovering an earlier, more vital self, rediscovering a reason for his art, reinventing a cinema of crude materials and passionate technique.

In the end, when Terry's new-found joy in his technique has failed him and left Sally dead in his arms, he sits on a bench and listens to her last words on tape, then the tape spins on its reels in Jack's editing room when no one's there, as if it's circling on its own, and in the screening room her recorded scream is coming from the mouth of the girl shrinking from the looming knife in *Coed* 

De Palma's Scarface: The last stand of Tony Montana (Al Pacino). Frenzy, De Palma's camera gliding around the figure of Jack watching and listening, saying 'good scream' over and over as the film plays again, until he puts his hands to his head and covers his ears.

It's a purely harrowing scene, De Palma's greatest shock, a confessional moment rendered with an objectivity that keeps us suspended between distance and identification. We know, as De Palma does, where this horror comes from, the despair that overtakes us as we watch ourselves, technicians, cut the deepest pain out of ourselves and turn it into product, into images of violence whose triviality is surreally disproportionate to their traumatic sources. What we don't know, as De Palma doesn't, is whether this communal replay of private nightmares, the American movie, is invigorating or numbing-or, like the drugs Montana deals, somehow both at once. De Palma's assumption of the identity of a Hollywood pro in Scarface is his way of exploring the last implication of the sick joke at the end of Blow Out, plunging himself at last into the cold heart of the American screen.



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#### **FILM REVIEWS**



Another Country: Guy Bennett (Rupert Everett).

#### Bad boys

## Another Country and An Englishman Abroad Richard Mayne

Blunt, Burgess, Maclean and Philby—the Famous Four raise at least as many questions. What damage they did is a matter for the professionals: but art may help us answer the other three. Why did they do it? How did they remain undetected? What sort of life can defectors

expect in Moscow?

Julian Mitchell's play Another Country is largely an essay on the question Why? Its central character 'Guy Bennett' is not to be taken unequivocally for Guy Burgess, any more than its school setting is Burgess' Eton or Mitchell's Winchester. But likenesses remain. 'Bennett'. like Burgess, is flamboyant, a negligent rebel-bright, witty and self-indulgent. He's also homosexual, at first flippantly, conforming to fashion, then falling in love. Humiliated by his peers, debarred from school honours, he decides that his rebellion will be permanent. In doing so, he gives an answer to the second question: how to avoid detection? By double bluff, his raffish exterior will put inquisitors off the scent.

Like all plays, Another Country simplifies. To lend substance to Guy's dissension, it invents a youthful Marxist, 'Tommy Judd', somewhat resembling Esmond Romilly or John Cornford, whom Burgess met at Cambridge. Discussion with 'Judd', it would seem, hardens Guy's convictions—although many who knew Burgess still wonder whether he had more than whims. Anthony Powell, meeting him in 1939, found him 'absolutely nauseating . . a BBC fairy of the fat go-getting sort'. Others dismissed him as a name-dropper, posthumously flirting with Marx. Yet Anthony Blunt, who claimed to have been converted by Burgess, described him as 'totally convinced'.

The truth was elusive, and perhaps complex: Goronwy Rees, when Burgess confessed to him, wondered whether it wasn't 'one of his elaborately cruel jokes'.

On the stage, Another Country seemed to lean towards Rees rather than Blunt. 'Guy Bennett' remained equivocal, toying with the idea of permanent rebellion, leaving it uncertain whether he would defect. The play could be read as a school play, a Guy Doesn't Pull It Off. Julian Mitchell's film adaptation (Virgin) opens it out, framing the school scenes in a Moscow prologue and epilogue. This lends gravity to what had become a lighter production than Mitchell perhaps intended; and Marek Kanievska's very intent direction of the film gives it greater force too. The camera, sometimes seemingly hand-held, swoops and plunges into scenes like a housemaster scenting malpractice: it focuses tightly on groups of boys in dimly lit interiors, more claustrophobic than the stage. Kanievska admits that his school world is impressionistic. The opening, on the river, looks like yet unlike Cambridge-a nudge forward in time to the Apostles, to Klugman and Blunt. Later scenes, shot in Oxford, recall a larger Eton-or Westminster, Kim Philby's old school. Would the Corps, in the 1930s, have drilled with naked fixed bayonets? Would so much sherry have been available? Was open-air assembly a routine? It matters very little. What counts is the politics, the hypnotic concentration on order, status, rules and trophies—a self-governing society inventing Rousseau as an improvement on Hobbes. All boarding schools and many day schools face the same Toytown problem: how to tame young barbarians at the height of their vigour and sexuality; how to turn a jungle into a community. Hence the mumbo-jumbo. Hence the prefects and the spoils system. Kanievska the outsider, son of Polish immigrants and an early leaver from his comprehensive school, has perfectly seized Julian Mitchell's analytical point.

This, more than Guy's double bluff, explains why the spies could hide for so long. They looked and sounded right; and there was always *omertà*, the schoolboy's and the Mafia's code of honour. Like discreet civil servants bamboozling their political masters—verb sap—the prefects of Another Country keep the teachers in the dark. Summary justice avoids scandal. Secrecy becomes second nature. The seeds of treason are sown.

The cast, though getting on a bit now—the two leading players are 24 this year-and full of stage experience, act out the drama with fine restraint. As Menzies the dour schoolboy politician, Frederick Alexander milks his faint resemblance to David Steel. Colin Firth, as Judd, looks more SCM than Marxistbut that figures: the moral earnestness is needed to keep laughter out of some of his Party lines. As Harcourt, Guy's love, Cary Elwes adds further resonance by resembling Donald Maclean. But it's Rupert Everett, recreating his original stage part as Guy, who strides away with the picture. In the theatre, the Guy I saw was Dan Day-Lewis, sardonic, satanic, and unpredictable—very close to Burgess the rake. Rupert Everett gives us Guy the guerrilla, pistolero of the prefects' room, star-crossed lover, romantic revolutionary, an angry and resolute Communist recruit.

To cap it, we see him in Moscow in a shabby room, old and scrawny but still upright, his throat shrunk, his hair stiffly militant, an aged bespectacled cockatoo. Red Lion Square, not Red Square, seems his proper habitat: he might be a relic from some rationalist lost cause. No: not quite Guy Burgess, by all his friends' accounts; but a startling, dignified transformation scene. Full marks (no pun intended) to the make-up supervisor, Sarah Monzani, as well as to Rupert Everett himself.

His Guy-in-Moscow is a far, harsh cry from Alan Bates' in *An Englishman Abroad* (BBCTV). Bates looks and sounds uncannily like Burgess—a staggering contrast with previous lean and *Lumpen* roles. This is as it should be, because Alan Bennett's and John Schlesinger's hour-long TV film is based on fact. As everyone knows by now, Coral Browne met Burgess in Moscow when she was acting there: he came round, was sick in a dressing-room, then invited her to lunch. He wanted her to order some clothes for him in London. She did, but kept the tale to herself until after his death.

It's a slight, bizarre anecdote; but Bennett and Schlesinger have made it a sparkling gem. Moscow thev've recreated in Dundee—more successfully than Michael Apted used Finland for *Gorky* 

Park. Coral Browne plays herself when younger: amused, imperious, fearless, hardly actressy except on stage with her barnstorming troupe. The only implausibility is the echoing British Embassy where she seeks help to find Burgess: two twittering attachés refuse to consider her case. Perhaps they really did-but could they have been so camp? A further touch of fantasy occurs in London, where Burgess' tailor finds his particulars amid Dickensian archives, while another outfitter professes shock. In the weird world of gents' apparel, I suppose it could just happen; but it smacks a little of Alan Bennett's having us in stitches Beyond

Tom Driberg, when he met Burgess in Moscow in 1956, described him as

'instantly recognisable, despite a slight greying of his dark hair': there once more was 'his bird-bright, ragamuffin face'. Alan Bates has brilliantly caught both the sharpness and the shiftiness—the quick eyes, the high colour, the thickening jowls. Flashes of old wit fall into silence; memories shadow the face like hurrying clouds. On the gramophone, he plays a Jack Buchanan record, 'Whostole my heart away?' (The same song recurs in Another Country.) Watching alertly for approval or complicity, he boasts his enjoyment of Moscow's meagre fare: it recalls the Mark Twain pauper serving turnips for every course. The charm is dissolute, but he knows it: just so long as it works. It does, and the suits arrive, and he preens himself, the snappy

dresser braving the climate, armoured by Savile Row.

A paradigm for Britain, all style and nostalgia in a powerful, hostile world? Alan Bennett doesn't say so; nor would he, if he thought it. Ostensibly, An Englishman Abroad is apolitical. 'Of course I miss London,' Burgess told Tom Driberg. 'Naturally I regret living outside my own country, but I prefer to live in a Socialist country.' Did he? We'll never know. 'I read an enormous lot,' he confessed. Neither Mitchell's nor Bennett's Guy gives quite that ambivalent impression: the one's too austere, the other too patently vain. Together, they help explain ex-patriot expatriates. Beginning in Another Country, each ended up as An Englishman Abroad.



Reflections: William Masters (Gabriel Byrne).

#### A House in Ireland

Reflections/Penelope Houston

The Irish countryside: green, melancholy, decaying and damp, lashed with rain from the sky and not a movie machine. It's a setting with acres of literary precedent to draw on; and Reflections, a Channel 4 offering directed by Kevin Billington and scripted by John Banville from his own novella The Newton Letter, is a film of decidedly literary cast. None the worse, one might add, for that. William Masters (Gabriel Byrne), a young historian, rents the lodge of a ramshackle estate to work in undistracted peace on a book about Newton and the madness that struck the great scientist. William's book, it's fairly clear, is not going to be completed. His only neighbours are the family in the big, blank-faced house up the drive: his unfathomably dreamy landlady, her drunken husband Edward Lawless (Donal McCann), the niece who snatches at William as a chance of escape, and the little boy who plays alone in the grounds, aiming a bow and arrow like some vaguely threatening Cupid. In

a desultory, incurious way, William meets them about the place, finds himself involved in some kind of connection with each of them, and at the end has to realise how little he has understood about them. The detached historian/scientist has not bothered to ask the obvious questions or to see what was plainly there.

There are no very dark family secrets. The film's governing idea is that we share the point of view of the traditional outsider and observer, and that in this case the point of view is wrong: he observes but he doesn't see. Stealthily, Reflections lets its shape emerge out of nuance, tempo, the setting itself, odd encounters along the overgrown paths (like the one with the prosaic but remarkable ratcatchers), or in a cluttered greenhouse which turns out to be not a romantic survival from a grander past but the last gasp of a once flourishing nursery business. Weather and place are more than background: the shift from high summer to the onset of autumn, which must have taken some managing in a film with a five-week shooting schedule; the sense of the squat little lodge as an observation post on a kind of frontier, attached to but not quite part of the estate.

In the film's central scene, a birthday party for the silent child, other outsiders arrive: the smart, townified, sabrerattling sister, who displays the sort of social curiosity about William that he never shows about her family, and her English husband. The build-up to this sequence is a marvellous scene of afternoon drinking, as William and Edward kill a bottle, each in turn pouring a discreet measure for himself and a much larger one for his companion, as though sustained by vestigial, genteel Irish notions of drinking as a fine art. Much later, with the desperate Edward sprawled at their feet and the doctor summoned, William essays something approaching emotional involvement with his landlady, to be answered by an abstracted, 'I'm sorry. I wasn't listening.'

Reflections is well named: a reflective film, of shifting, watery surfaces. It also, incidentally, takes due account of Isaac Newton, the invisible character who is quoted in an epigraph and discussed less as a scientist than as a man who abandoned his work. The context, inescapably, is literary, and there are occasional echoes, in the failure to grasp depths of distress, of Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier, which Kevin Billington filmed so strikingly for Granada a few years ago. Billington himself could, in feature film terms, be regarded as a casualty from the last great wave of optimism about British film-making back in the 1960s. After directing landmark television documentaries, he made several features but was among those stranded when the tide of American investment receded. He has not been idle, of course, in the years between. Thanks to Channel 4's 'window' and an Artificial Eye release, Reflections brings back to the big screen a director who has grown in subtlety since his first features, and who had been too long away.

#### **FILM REVIEWS**

#### Uneasy lies the head

Christine and The Dead Zone Philip Strick

Not unlike the demented character he himself plays in *Creepshow*, Stephen King has in mild bewilderment seen success bursting from him in a thicket of uncontrollable growth. His eight novels have all been bestsellers, and since his persuasive style is achieved with enviable speed he has found time for some screenplays as well. The fashion may prove short-lived, as he's the first to grant, but for the moment every producer in Hollywood appears eager to own, like some prestigious species of tropical houseplant, a Stephen King property.

Lewis Teague's Cujo, from King's own (uncredited) script, has had a good, if not outstanding, recent commercial run. Dino DeLaurentiis has assigned Mark (Gold of the Amazon Women) Lester to tackle Firestarter and New World Pictures is devoting \$3 million to Children of the Corn, King's screenplay from one of his Night Shift stories. Meanwhile, John Carpenter's Christine and David Cronenberg's The Dead Zone, unleashed in close proximity by the same distributor (Columbia-EMI-Warner), provide the useful opportunity to judge whether, when it comes to the special boundaries of King's domain, today's film-maker (the echoes of Carrie and The Shining still ringing in his ears) is left with any moves to

Originally snapped up for Stanley Donen to direct, *The Dead Zone* came to Cronenberg by way of Debra Hill, Carpenter's early partner on films like *Halloween* and *The Fog.* Cronenberg trimmed the story from a sprawlingly apocalyptic original into a more modest account of a schoolteacher who acquires the ability to 'see' violent events, past or future, in the lives of people he touches. The gift scares him into seclusion until, accidentally encountering a candidate for senatorial office whose future potentially carries global disaster, he is forced to become an assassin.

From King's text, the film of Dead Zone inherits generous amounts of vagueness and coincidence. There's no indication, for a start, where the 'gift' comes from; unlike the similarly precognitive skills of The Shining, there are no evolutionary implications and one must assume it's what might be called Carrie's Syndrome. After a traffic accident and a five-year coma, his only previous brainstorm a slight queasiness on a rollercoaster, the schoolteacher wakes up, holds his nurse's hand, and is able to tell that her daughter's bedroom is on fire. Each time he has such visions, they weaken him, which seems an inevitable biological price; however, the 'dead zone' itself gets everyone into something of a muddle. King described it as the effect of a brain tumour, said to be a frequent condition among assassins, but on-screen it's confusingly identified as an area permitting the future to be changed.

With all its irrationalities, The Dead Zone is Cronenberg's most accomplished film so far, created with flair, fluency and welcome understatement. No exploding heads or bursting stomachs, and apart from the unnecessary and repellent suicide, very little blood. Instead, the impact comes from incongruity, as the teacher, reading minds, finds himself plunged into a flaming nursery, wandering through a battlefield, or standing as helpless witness to a murder. In gentler contexts, the film is impressively reticent. When a girl drives away from the man she has lost, she weeps briefly, silently, behind the windscreen, before turning her car down a bleak road, all in one discreet shot. Similarly, as a father comes to terms with the realisation that he has been close, from sheer obduracy, to killing his own son, the camera simply eases back across the room from his blank face.

Where King and Cronenberg turn out to overlap is in the eccentricities of their characters; both film-maker and writer specialise in a disconcerting behavioural oddness that Dead Zone captures exactly, not just in Christopher Walken's superbly haunted performance, perpetually seeming to listen for fragments of a distant conversation in his head, but also in the smaller roles—the hesitant Bibleclutching parents, the desperate cop, the obsessive businessman. The specialist, of course, is a familiar Cronenberg figure, and King's Doctor Weizak, excellently played with a gleam of jovial lunacy by Herbert Lom, effortlessly resurrects such alumni as Antoine Rouge, Dr. Keloid, and Brian O'Blivion.

With Christine we seem at first to be in quite different territory. What captures the mind of Arnie, gangling American teenager with standard parent problems and the usual obsession with girls who might but won't, is a 1958 Plymouth Fury automobile, all glowing chromium and high-gloss scarlet. As usual, King provides no explanation for his central premise—a self-regenerating car that plays only 50s rock 'n' roll on its radio and adores its owner with a jealous passion—and, as usual, for as long as the story lasts, the daftness of this beautiful idea (Christine is street-lethal, for no perceptible reason, straight off the assembly line) doesn't seem to matter.

But although both could be called road movies of a kind, the most notable common theme between *Dead Zone* and *Christine* is the horror-writer's most convenient device—the trap. Like *Cujo*, both films are compilations of enclosed



Christine: Plymouth Fury.

emergency, the walls closing in, the time running out, and each is centred on a figure abruptly imprisoned by the irrational but inescapable impulses of his own mind. States of siege certainly find John Carpenter on home ground, and Christine turns out to be full of Carpenter landmarks—the wide, eerie streets of Halloween, the atmosphere of urban warfare from Assault on Precinct 13, the indestructible enemy and terror of 'possession' from The Thing, the supernatural hunger for vengeance from The Fog. The primary victim, as in Someone's Watching Me, is a cornered, hysterical girl. And one could argue that Elvis: the Movie (shot by the same cameraman, Don Morgan) was a first exercise on Christine's amiable suggestion that rock 'n' roll offers special compensation in cases of deprived childhood.

Where Cronenberg, however, gives the impression of having enlisted all the King's men to equip his own private army, Carpenter's interest strikes one as less personal. The film is made with spectacular efficiency, but its signature is ill-defined, as if eroded by the King imprimatur, outshone by the charisma of Christine herself and overtaken by the pace of the whole venture, which had Christine completed less than a year from first publication of the novel. At character level, it's little more than a series of sketches: the weakling, the bully, the loyal friend, the weary cop.

More King than Carpenter, surely, are the exasperated parents ('Part of being a parent,' claims their son gloomily, 'is trying to kill your kids'), the classroom cruelties, the teenage feuds. But no matter. King's fireball image of Christine, an envoy straight from hell blazing down the highway in pursuit of a terrified thug, carries the kind of charge that a filmmaker, like the rest of us, can only wonder at, and cherish.



John Glenn's triumph.

#### Cowboy fliers

The Right Stuff/John Pym

In his book The Right Stuff Tom Wolfe gives the artful impression of having told us everything needful (and more) about the selection, training and missions of the Mercury astronauts, America's first men in space. Having undergone an assault course of detail, the reader finds himself in the end eased into an admiration of Wolfe's heroes. Stanley Kubrick imagined for us the grandeur of space travel, and there has been no more fanciful or poetic image of it than his mighty spacecraft wheeling to the Blue Danube waltz. But both Wolfe and Kubrick have also described the other side of the coin: the tedium not the terror of the delays before blast off; the boredom of jogging on an unchanging track. The romance, however, even in a month when satellites can still go ludicrously astray, persists only slightly diminished.

Oddly, for a medium which has given us 2001 and profitably co-opted space for many lesser odysseys, the cinema is not really suited to telling Tom Wolfe's story. Pluming trails, parting clouds, long shots of rocketing jets are all very well, but the issue here is what's going on inside the pilot's helmet, what it feels like to break the sound barrier, what in short gives a man the temperament, the cast of mind, the bravery, modesty and ambition ('the right stuff') to qualify him for that mystical brotherhood of true pilots.

The director Philip Kaufman and his team have tacitly recognised this and wisely avoided *Star Wars* effects. And there is another reason: this is after all space travel in its infancy: we watch archive footage from an age ago of the Cape Canaveral launches, but once the capsules are in space ours is always the

pilots' point of view. The effects of The Right Stuff (Columbia-EMI-Warner) are in fact chiefly drawn from an earlier cinematic tradition, the Western. The magnificent seven-Carpenter, Shepard, Glenn, Schirra, Cooper, Slayton and Grissom, that still familiar roll call more than twenty years on-are a mixed bunch compelled by an unspoken code, service loyalty, love of country, to work as a team to beat the black hats. And running like an expressionistic nightmare through the film are scenes in which Soviet rockets blast off in an infernal glow (and always more successfully, it seems) while the anonymous architect of their prolowers with superimposed gramme menace.

The lone hero of this symbolic conflict between Good and Evil is a man not directly involved in it but whose presence is reverently invoked at the American astronauts' hour of vulgar triumph, a great Texas banquet over which a puppetlike LBJ presides, and who in an epilogue gives proof positive that he does indeed possess the right stuff. Chuck Yeager, a legendary fighter and test pilot, who retired from the USAF a brigadier general and appears in this celebration of his achievements in the fictional role of a barman, is really the subject of *The Right Stuff* 

Yeager is a cowboy hero of the old school, tall, handsome, cussed, brave, and backed by a good woman more than half his equal. On the night before he is due to attempt to break the sound barrier he smacks into a branch during a horse race with his wife Glennis and breaks some ribs. It is an old rule of cowboy behaviour that when there is a job to be done, any non-apparent serious injuries should not be mentioned. So next morning, showing no sign of pain, he persuades a confederate to supply him with a length of broom handle, which will allow him to shut the canopy of his jet with his good arm, and sets off to achieve his mission. In the ramshackle bar where the fliers hang out, its mesh door banging in the wind, he's a legend, an original (all the other legends are dead, their pictures pinned to the wall): not the sheriff, but the impulsive loner whose apotheosis is to take up a brand new jet and head straight for the stars. He coolly extricates himself from the resulting catastrophe and despite a nasty head injury is seen marching towards his rescuers with his parachute under his arm, folded in the regulation manner. Sam Shepard, more Gary Cooper than John Wayne, gets him to a

The Right Stuff, photographed by Caleb Deschanel, does not bathe the astronauts in a rosy glow, its look is in fact singularly hard, bright and beautiful, but it does make us like them as individuals, now, rather than old-fashioned heroes from some other time. Gus Grissom, whose capsule sank to the bottom of the ocean and who subsequently died with two other astronauts when fire raked

their capsule, emerges with particular honour, and is given the ultimate accolade of Yeager's taciturn praise. While John Glenn, the 1984 Presidential hopeful, is for all his self-righteousness a believably good-hearted comrade. One of the film's achievements is not to overstate or to underplay the attractions of service loyalties. This, in a way, was how it was before the shadow of Vietnam fell across America, when to be signed up by Life magazine really meant something, and when to be a pilot-astronaut for one's country might be trumpeted by the media but was still a genuine cause for national celebration.

#### London/Munich

### Loose Connections Chris Peachment

British films at present seem to divide between something like *The Ploughman's Lunch*, which can only reach a limited audience, and something more popular like *Loose Connections* (Fox). While the film may be genre material in a way, it is still fresh and doesn't break faith with the feelings it is dealing with. This is very much the sort of thing people would like to see at their Odeon.

Lest you think that this rather wan opening paragraph is the best I can do by way of damnation with faint praise, it should be made clear that it is essentially a quote from director Richard Eyre given to Tim Pulleine while shooting the film and published in SIGHT AND SOUND last autumn; the wording has been changed to reported speech, but the sense retained. Within the same article, there is also: '[It is] hopefully gentle—smiles rather than laughs', which comes from Maggie Brooks, the scriptwriter. With both estimations one can only concur. How easily are such ambitions fulfilled.

The structure is very simple. She: a middle class feminist who advertises for a like-minded co-driver (female, vegetarian, non-smoker—could Brooks have been listening to very old jokes about the classified ads in certain listings magazines?) to accompany her in her new home-built jeep to a feminist conference in Munich. He: Liverpudlian lad of considerable guile and technical incompetence, who persuades her to take him on the trip. En route, they fight, and then they...

The film's opening sequence, with the flare of arc-welding torches, punctuating rock music, and some heavy chiaroscuro lighting, raises loose intimations of a forthcoming road movie. Expectations are soon dispelled, however; the jeep is revealed as the sort of gaudy piece of kit-built fun-car which no driver worth their salt (male or female) would take down the cinematic road in search of themselves, their destiny or any other of

#### **FILM REVIEWS**

the goals that beckon in the road movie. Nor does the film conform to the *locus classicus* given to the genre by Wim Wenders, by which 'the emotion comes from the motion'. All that comes from this jeep's errant journey to Munich is a kind of travel sickness.

Another quote in the SIGHTANDSOUND article jokingly suggests that this is a remake of *It Happened One Night*, and the film's press handout continues the notion that there is sexual sparring worthy of Tracy and Hepburn; even by the hyperbolic standards of publicity material this is coming it a bit strong. What we have here is Cliff Richard's *Summer Holiday* for a cast of two. Of the two characters, Stephen Rea is the more successful. From the moment that he is first seen pinning on a 'Gay' badge to persuade Lindsay Duncan that he is a

safe partner, one can sense a certain quality of Chaplinesque cunning in Rea's hunched body and hunted expression. His vitality and hopeless pragmatism give the film its best moments and provide a colourful antidote to Lindsay Duncan's more po-faced pronouncements about millenia of oppression at the hands of the male half of the population. Duncan copes well enough with the problem of making this harpy come to life, but the part suggests too much of a caricature harridan from a Posy Simmonds cartoon—fine for six frames of a Monday morning, less good to sustain a feature film.

In its own terms, then, an acceptable piece of entertainment, 'smiles rather than laughs'. When seen in the wider context of current British cinema, the whole project becomes more worrying. It

is perhaps ironic that with the state of production in this country so anaemic, each film should come under heavier scrutiny. Were there a more healthy number of films emerging, then Loose Connections would take its decently obscure place somewhere in the middle of a pyramid, providing the base needed to support the pinnacle. Nothing wrong with that. But with the means for production under fire from all sides, what we need now is a heroic stand for excellence. not retreat to this sort of TV play-as-film under cover of the justifications printed above. For what we have here is something that would not be diminished by showing on video. Which may be perfectly acceptable to its director, to judge by his pronouncements; but is not what one would hope to say about something consciously made for the cinema.

#### **Tightrope Act**

#### Rumble Fish/Chris Auty

Francis Coppola's recent history-from the shabby forced sale of his Zoetrope studios through to the bloated antics surrounding Cotton Club—gives you no preparation for the sudden, heady rush of pleasure that comes with Rumble Fish (UIP). Shot back to back with The Outsiders, in Tulsa, and based again on a novel by teenage diarist S. E. Hinton, it could not be more different from the previous film. The Outsiders addressed the stagey Technicolor manners of 50s Hollywood melodrama (with a dash of Laughton's Night of the Hunter thrown in). Too ritualistic to seem contemporary, too casual to look like a period pastiche, the film failed to fill the defiantly artificial space it had chosen. By contrast, the new film achieves the status of monochrome dream-poem almost effortlessly. It's ironic, since the aesthetic models for Rumble Fish come not from Hollywood but lie embedded in European cinema, from Cocteau and Buñuel to the Nouvelle

More than anything, the dialogue (filtered by a soundmix of expressionist extremes) sets the tone: 'What is this? Another glorious battle for the Kingdom?' asks the Bike Boy (Mickey Rourke), poet, dreamer, living myth, unthinking Adonis with his lazy smile. And in the moment of abstraction provoked by such articulacy, such vision, his younger brother Rusty-James (Matt Dillon) finds his belly sliced open by the knife of a defeated teen gang leader. The Bike Boy is truly a figure briefly returned from the dead-an unexpected, unwelcome visitor, eventually killed for keeps by the bullet of the town's unforgiving cop. What it is from the past that needs to be forgiven never becomes entirely clear. Contemporaries claim him as an idol, a dream lover, a creature who has been to California, where the dreams are



Rumble Fish: Rusty-James (Matt Dillon) and the Bike Boy (Mickey Rourke).

made. And through all this barrage of intention and desire, the Bike Boy remains an enigma—as charming to the audience out here as he is to the audience of hangers-on that he would vaguely like to cast off in the film.

Monochrome. Black and White. Where Mickey Rourke is 'the Pied Piper', a soul searching for destiny, Rusty-James is a soul beset by dogmatic certainties. Lusting after the lissom Diane Lane, actively trying to re-create the days of the gangs and rumbles which he associates with his elder brother, he is blind to his brother's sense of the fragile beauty of the world (symbolised perfectly in the sequences where the fish in the pet shop window, but only they, are revealed to possess brilliant colour). His eyes are open only to immediate consequences—fighting for status, mouthing off against school, reaching straight for the liquor cabinet at an impromptu lakeside party in someone's empty house. And presiding over these two balls of mercury, hair matted with sweat, cigar butt clamped between teeth, Dennis Hopper turns in one of his relaxed performances as their amiably

alcoholic father. 'You poor baby,' he calls Rusty-James, an assessment that's damningly simple. 'It's too bad,' he says of his elder son's eventual and inevitable death, shot while liberating fighting fish (rumble fish) from the pet store and carrying them to the river. Both descriptions are complete, and both remain as enigmatic as the Oedipal crisis of the boys themselves—brought up in the absence of a mother who ran away to California and teamed up with a man of substance.

But the substance of this narrative, simply described, is not much more than a kind of winsome adolescent nostalgia. The substance of the film as a whole lies elsewhere. It lies in the fabulous Expressionist compositions, where frame angles tilt alarmingly to turn buildings into precipices and streets into mean alleys. It lies in the jazzy sound and nervy jumpcuts of the Bike Boy walking down The Strip at night, a scene that would almost match into one of the Belmondo's manic strolls in *Breathless*. It lies in the heavy-lidded lyricism of the two boys' fantasies, charmed by their own physical beauty,

figures from Cocteau, with Matt Dillon looking down on his own inert body and dreaming of a series of tearful tributes after he has been coshed with a tyre iron. And, most improbably of all, it lies in the cynical moments of fantasy (à la Buñuel) which show Dillon's convent girlfriend leering down at him, dressed in nothing but black panties and bra, from a schoolroom cupboard or the shelf over a machine-tool shop floor.

Such a mixture of impossibly distinct visions may sound like a kind of cinematic raspberry sundae. But Coppola's sense of excess is teasingly well controlled. Stewart Copeland's bulging, swinging, rapping musical score suggests something on the edges of musical time—an amalgam of swing, reggae and romantic slush. And in Benny the Barman, Coppola supplies a figure who summarises the tightrope act of the filmplayed like some gibbering character role from a 40s B-movie, the part is in fact filled by contemporary musican-poet Tom Waits. It's clear the pool-bar has always been there, and yet with every appearance on camera it seems that the whole locale is a fiction which he (and the cinema) calls into being at will.

With clocks ticking crazily on every wall, falling silent only in the looming presence of the policeman, Rumble Fish advertises itself as a film about the desperate loss of innocence that reduces life after childhood. But the experience of the film catalogues a thousand moments of adult restlessness. It makes a history of them, almost, by its regular reference to the Bike Boy's motorcycle trip to California, and by his brother's eventual fulfilment of his dream-riding to the edge of the ocean. When the Bike Boy first appears to save Rusty-James it's on the icon of 50s macho-a Harley Davidson motorcycle, native American-built, symbol of postwar prosperity, bearer of a thousand simple dreams with its own simple 1,000cc engine. When, at the end, Bike Boy steals a motorcycle and prepares for his personal sacrifice in freeing the fish, it's on a Kawasaki (albeit with the name scratched out), a Japanese import, symbol of foreign sophistication, icon of consumerism, with its delicate clockwork of moving parts and dull, modern efficiency. Rumble Fish draws the arc between the eras marked by the two machines, from the romantic to the prosaic—and the spark that passes along it, however ignited by European cinema, is the continuing vitality of the American dream, pictured in the images and sounds of teenage angst.

the scene in *The Third Man* where Holly Martins' loyalty to Harry Lime is undermined by a visit to the children's ward and a glimpse of the effects wrought by diluted black market penicillin.

It is a not unpleasing irony therefore, that what seems intended as a carefully balanced reportage—a huge success in France, no doubt because it simultaneously primes and defuses the particular paranoia about police tactics that 1968 did nothing to dispel—should look so much like new wine poured into old bottles, or vice versa. It shows that cops are both human and fallible like anyone else. It demonstrates, with the title mean-



La Balance: Cops (Richard Berry and Christophe Malavoy).

ing either an informer or a set of scales, the delicate balance that distinguishes justice from injustice. But it is also suffused with a curiously heady romanticism, evident chiefly in the way Dédé and Nicole are formally presented as starcrossed lovers living their last doomladen moments of happiness, but also in the sinister decadence of Ronet's gang boss, first seen delicately trimming stalks for a flower arrangement, later fussily presiding over his own cuisine. Not the least of the pleasures of La Balance is the way it filters its contemporary vision through those Carné-Duvivier memories of a more innocent past. 

#### Police tactics

#### La Balance/Tom Milne

A man whom we soon discover to be an informer walks down a shabbily busy little back street at the beginning of Bob Swaim's La Balance (Gala). Despite the exquisitely muted colours with which nocturnal Paris is painted, and despite the intricate choreography with which his passage is acknowledged by lounging acquaintances and furtive passers-by, the illusion of cinéma-vérité is perfect. Yet the image that springs oddly to mind is one from the days of arch-artifice: Pépé le Moko, say, making his triumphal progress through the admiring milieu of the Casbah.

A moment later the informer is abruptly gunned down in the street by two anonymous men in a sleek car, and with the undercover squads making themselves indistinguishable from the underworld, word quickly goes out that the police themselves shopped him as an expendable man. Inspector Paluzzi (Richard Berry) is disturbed by the rumour, not so much because it is untrue (it might very well not be), but because undercover operations require informers, and informers require to feel secure.

So, with information decreasing and crime increasing, Paluzzi decides to build himself a better mousetrap. The mouse is the local crime king Roger Massina (Maurice Ronet), and the proposed bait either a pimp called Dédé (Philippe Léotard)—once a member of Massina's

gang until they quarrelled-or the latter's girl Nicole (Nathalie Baye), inadvertent cause of that quarrel. Very much in love and dedicated to minding their own business, Dédé and Nicole refuse to play ball. Informers are beneath their contempt. But Paluzzi, sleek pussycat of the game, has not only all the weapons and the cunning but justice on his side. Well aware that he is in effect persuading Dédé and Nicole to sign their own death warrants (though in the right cause), he plays one off against the other, escalates a policy of legal harassment, employs a judicial measure of violence, and gradually separates the pair, each one within his own vicious circle, until he has what he wants: an informer (or two).

Swaim plays fair throughout. Having made the acquaintance of a member of the Brigades Territoriales and spent six months observing their work, he 'was struck by how young the cops are, between 20 and 30 years old. They are the children of May 1968': leftish, full of humour, lovers of rock and the movies. Pointedly, one of the older squad members, a veteran of the Algerian War who likes to get his licks in first and ask questions after (especially if the skin happens to be on the dark side), is presented as a disciple of Dirty Harry. But the others, sons of The French Connection's Popeye Doyle, are seen simply as men given a necessary job to do and not asking too many questions while doing it. At the same time, no particular emphasis is laid on the heinousness of criminals and their activities; certainly no unanswerable emotional rhetoric like

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

#### Zéro de Conduite

MY LAST BREATH: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel

Jonathan Cape/£8.95

The most important point to make about this book, and about many of the later films of Luis Buñuel, is that they do not pose questions or suggest any complex riddle to be worked out patiently; they are there primarily to give pleasure. The way they achieve this end is conventional: we are absorbed, surprised, excited and charmed at the invitation to share in the obsessions and frivolities of a man who is so at home in his imagination that he can afford the courtesy of sharing it with the world. Buñuel is the most hospitable of twentieth century geniuses—he keeps open house. One feels he would never ask one to leave; nor, equally, would he be disgruntled if we felt uncomfortable and departed without a word.

None of which is to deny the mysterious and the mischievous which inform-even dominateso much of his greatest work. A good example of both these qualities is illustrated by an anecdote in this autobiography. When he was making Los Olvidados, one of the most realistic of his great works, he wanted to place a full orchestra and conductor high on a half-finished building site in the background, the foreground being occupied by the running figures of delinquent boys. His hope was that the audience might think they had imagined seeing such an image. He was teasing.

The playfulness and off-handed objectivity which are in so many of the films are essential ingredients of this book. It is written in collaboration with Jean-Claude Carrière, the scriptwriter of most of Buñuel's later French and Spanish movies. Buñuel declares that he is 'no writer'; but that his colleague is. Immediately following this announcement comes the first and in many ways the most elegant and revealing chapter of the book. It is called 'Memory' and comprises a stunning philosophical treatise on the nature of memory itself. In less than three pages, Buñuel manages to convey his views on the subject in a manner that would have delighted Marcel Proust: 'You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all, just as intelligence without the possibility of expression is not really an intelligence. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it we are nothing.'

Very little else in the book tries to be as abstract as this. For instance, the chapter on dreams reveals a surprisingly banal list of his imaginings while asleep: far more about his dream life can be gathered from his films than from the book. But perhaps I am being naive. Perhaps Buñuel is so deliberately prosaic because he is covering up, guarding a hitherto undetectable privacy in his personality. Perhaps he feared that to deal analytically or even straightforwardly with his unconscious life would be to risk destroying a large part of his creative drive. He had a respect for superstition-a respect which in no way contradicted his studied contempt for it.

There is poetry, anecdotes and epigrams in abundance. I am personally very grateful for his account of a single image which has always stood out as directly symbolic, but symbolic of what, I could not fathom. 'I've tried my whole life simply to accept the images which present themselves to me without analysing them. When we were shooting That Obscure Object of Desire I suddenly found myself asking Fernando Rey to pick up a bag filled with tools lying on a bench, sling it over his shoulder, and walk away. The action was completely irrational, yet it seemed absolutely right to me . . . Why? I can't explain it, and I don't enjoy rummaging around in the clichés of psychoanalysis.

For all his surface scorn for analysis, he is a sharp, even intellectual critic of Surrealism. He points out that although this was the movement which avowedly set out to overthrow the accepted order of things in society, its members all came from prosperous or educated backgrounds. There is a sort of infantilism about their enterprise: it is not exactly that the members rang the bell and ran away-rather they rang the bell, pelted whoever answered with stones, manure or flowers, and then ran away, to find themselves famous, and nothing truly destroyed. The bourgeoisie dearly love to laugh at the pranks of the arrogant and naughty.

Luis was the eldest of seven children. His father was a handsome, indolent landowner in Aragon; he was the favourite of his mother, who gave him the money to finance Un Chien Andalou. He was educated by the Jesuits in Saragossa, with whom he spent the seven most precious and susceptible years of his life. The influence of the dreaded Society of Jesus cannot be too strongly remarked. Characteristically, he declares that he has fond memories of the appalling oppressions and indignities meted out to the

Students of the Colegio, or rather he gets nearest to boasting when he declares that he had the best marks for academic work and the worst for conduct in the entire school. *Zéro de Conduite*, in fact. His sense of order and craving for anarchy may be traced directly to this Jesuit upbringing; as of course may his atheism and his slightly naive belief that religion, sex and death are as indissoluble a trinity as Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

There is a list at the front of the book of 32 films made between 1928 and 1977. About half of these were made in Mexico, and many of them are unfamiliar to British audiences. Buñuel says that some of them were no good, that he had taken projects on simply to support his family. There is a genuine contradiction here, because earlier in his life story he declares that he has never made any film purely for financial reasons. The most extraordinary fact about his creative life is that for fifteen years, from 1932 to 1947, he made no films at all. This was due to the political convictions which led him to leave Spain and go to the United States and Mexico, where work was difficult to find.

We may regret that the last triumphant decade of his creative life, from 1967 to 1977, is much less touched upon than the sixty years that preceded it. In the final period he made six films, four of which are masterpieces: Belle de Jour, Tristana, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie and That Obscure Object of Desire. But it is a commonplace that the immediate past is of far less consequence to the old than childhood and youth. Whatever omissions we may regret, Buñuel's autobiography is fit to set beside Jean Renoir's as the most revealing, charming, intelligent and enjoyable book written by a twentieth century genius and devoted to both his life and his work.

JULIAN JEBB

#### Granada Lord

SIDNEY BERNSTEIN: A Biography by Caroline Moorehead Jonathan Cape/£12.95

Sidney Bernstein's motto, we are told, is 'If I rest, I rust.' After a career as crowded as his has been, he must gleam like polished chrome. The Granada empire alone would be sufficient work for most people's lifetimes. Starting from a small group of suburban music-halls left by his father in 1921, Bernstein developed an enterprising cinema chain, designed and operated with a

distinct house style. Fond memories of a Spanish walking tour prompted the name Granada; designer Theodore Komisarjevsky made his buildings live up to it with Moorish arches, medieval ceilings, Renaissance columns and every device of exotic architecture. In the 1950s, Bernstein pushed ahead into commercial television, turned Manchester and the Northwest into Granadaland. and ushered in Zoo Time with Desmond Morris, The World in Action and the salty soap opera of Coronation Street. His empire spread further: bingo, television bowling rentals, publishing, alleys, motorway service stations.

Yet Bernstein found ample time to conquer other worlds. During World War Two he served as Films Adviser to the Ministry of Information, co-ordinating the film industry's propaganda thrust; towards the end of the war, he performed a similar job, surreptitiously, for the American-based Psychological Warfare Division. He ventured directly into cinema production with Hitchcock in the late 40s and into theatre management in the early 30s (Private Lives, at the new Phoenix Theatre. was the principal triumph). He also maintained a vast international network of friends and a stream of vigorous lawsuits.

A strong, crucial industry force, yet a strangely private public figure: the combination makes Bernstein ripe for biographical investigation. Caroline Moore-head has performed the task excellently, though she cannot completely camouflage the problems inherent in any authorised biography of a successful person. Persistent good fortune, after all, offers little dramatic variety; and hymns of praise, no matter how deserved, tend to be tiring if they have too many verses. External appearances are forbiddingly sombre: Jonathan Cape's cover is poised midway in style between an expensive box of chocolates and a worthy volume of war memoirs. But once the tome is opened, everything brightens. For the author knows how to present facts without clogging up sentences; she knows the value—and the limitations—of quotation and anecdote.

Much detail is culled from Bernstein's personal documents, diaries and memoranda. Detail, clearly, is a Bernstein passion: he descended on his empires unannounced and scrutinised the troops with maddening tenacity. The dress of an ice-cream vendor, the dangling earrings of a secretary, telephone directories in the wrong alphabetical order: nothing escaped. Had he served as proofreader for the present book, we would doubtless have been spared 'D. W. Griffiths' and 'technicolour'. If lack of specialist film

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

knowledge leads the author into scattered inaccuracies, her journalistic skills ensure an exhilarating kaleidoscope of symbolic moments. There is Nancy Cunard smuggling a print of *Un Chien Andalou* into Britain inside a hatbox; or the Ministry of Information administrators austerely forbidding John Betjeman to decorate his office with a white fluffy carpet purchased at Heal's; or Lord Hailsham comparing the onset of commercial television to 'smallpox, bubonic plague and the Black Death.'

Such is the icing: the cake underneath proves equally nourishing. Chapters on the war years remain the most valuable, not least for the documentation of the abandoned film on German concentration camps, a project unknown to all previous commentators. We also explore the fascinating problems of combating bureaucratic inertia, navigating the minefield of Anglo-American relationships, and shepherding liberated countries towards British films and values. Throughout, the voice, manner and dress of Sidney Bernstein is ever present. Caroline Moorehead gives us a clear but paradoxical portrait: a 'Socialist millionaire', as the newspapers liked to dub him, jointly devoted to culture and

business; a man who clings like a limpet to sober suits, white shirts and ties, yet shows not an ounce of pomposity; a man whose briskness in taking offence is matched by scrupulous fairmindedness and generosity. An odd jumble of qualities, certainly, but they obviously provide the formula for preventing rust.

GEOFF BROWN

#### On Chaplin

CHAPLIN: THE MIRROR OF OPINION by David Robinson

Secker & Warburg/ $\mathfrak{L}9.95$ , (paper)  $\mathfrak{L}6.50$ 

The itch which always has to be scratched. Timothy J. Lyons' Charles Chaplin: A Guide to References and Resources, published in 1979, gave more than 1,400 book and periodical references. A year later Lennart Eriksson listed 500 books on Chaplin in 37 languages. David Robinson places at the top of the pyramid Theodore Huff's biography of 1951 and Chaplin's own autobiography of 1964. He is known to be at work on his own major book on

Chaplin; meanwhile, he offers as a foretaste this concise digest of how critics, newsmen, columnists, members of his family and others have viewed Chaplin the filmmaker and Chaplin the 'political man' throughout his life.

Although an unshakeable Chaplin man (even A Countess from Hong Kong, he argues, has retrospectively proved its more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger reviewers wrong), David Robinson has on the whole and on this occasion chosen to stand back from the fray. He is generous to those with whom he disagrees, and can even, from his position of historical overview, rightly find something of worth in such a doubtful book as Michael Chaplin's I Couldn't Smoke the Grass on My Father's Lawn.

Robinson runs briskly over Chaplin's life and career, that familiar story, and summarises the plots of a number of the films. He mentions but does not elaborate on some of the yellow journalism which rightly or wrongly attached itself to Chaplin; on occasion, as in the case of the Joan Barry paternity suit, he is necessarily forthright. The story, however, is on the whole simply necessary padding for a consideration of how the wheel of fortune turned for Chaplin. He quotes extensively, and only rarely, in desperation at the sea of material, resorts merely to listing the articles, monographs, books, etc, which issued forth at given periods. Like a gardener who has cleared the weeds from a flowerbed, he allows us to see Chaplin's best critics in perspective. He makes us want to turn again to James Agee, Garbo and the Night Watchmen, Raymond Durgnat and even to Otis Ferguson.

Max Linder, whom Chaplin regarded as the Professor to his Disciple, is allowed his say, at length; and one is grateful for the rare opportunity of hearing one artist speak approvingly but frankly about another, his opinions based on first-hand observation. (Too often, it seems, Chaplin is merely a mirror for the critic: though that also is part of his genius.) Linder accurately observes the simple but telling fact, borne out fascinatingly by the TV series Unknown Chaplin, that the comedian's success was due in large measure to his shooting ratio and his methodicalness.

David Robinson also draws particular attention to Louis Delluc's Charlot (1921), which reprinted an account of his art given by Chaplin in 1918 to the American Magazine. This again is not an itch being worried in a doctoral thesis or a partisan newspaper article but the real McCoy: one of those rare moments when artists, generally judiciously silent, analyse what they do intuitively.

JOHN PYM

## A cutting history

PORTRAIT OF AN INVISIBLE MAN: The Working Life of Stewart McAllister, Film Editor by Dai Vaughan BFI/\$24.95

British cinema has long had its own 'politique des auteurs' and Humphrey Jennings' name is nearly always cited in evidence of the case. Therein lies an apparent paradox; Jennings' 'personal' films consist mainly of government-sponsored documentaries made during the Second World War for purposes of national propaganda. The main strength of Dai Vaughan's book is that it manages to explain this paradox through a fresh, supposedly post-auteurist perspective.

Taking Jennings' work as the 'classical' centre of British docu-Vaughan traces its mentary, myth-making propensities to the contribution of the film editing. Portrait of an Invisible. Man is not, then, a conventional biography of a technician whose working life spanned a generation between the 30s and 50s and included editing credits on Jennings' major films-London Can Take It, Words for Battle, Listen to Britain, Fires Were Started and The Silent Village. So completely does the author, himself a practising film editor, identify with his subject that the figure of Stewart McAllister becomes an 'alter ego'. Vaughan clearly needed this personal and technical angle to emphasise the book's guiding principle that 'what matters—and it matters supremely if we are not to see art disappear down the diminishing spirals of psychological or social reductionism-is that evidence bearing upon how films are made should be rigorously distinguished from evidence bearing upon how they are to be understood.'

The collaborative nature of the film-making process is given critical precedence over such traditional concepts as personal style and social comment. This is precisely in line with Grierson's own anti-aesthetic and public service approach to documentary. But Vaughan's close textual analysis of the key Jennings-McAllister films does not examine the educational rationale behind the films' construction. Like Grierson himself, Vaughan blurs his own distinctions between technique and aesthetics by regarding the films' basic issues of social

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Graduate Admissions Secretary School of English and American Studies University of East Anglia Norwich NR4 7TJ Telephone Norwich (0603) 56161 responsibility as separate from such questions of aesthetics as the relationship between sound and image. In fact, they remain crucially bound together if there is to remain any useful distinction between education and propaganda. Vaughan would have been wise in avoiding this knotty problem if he had not insisted on the myth-making potential of the creative juxtaposition of sound and image.

Education is debased to the level of pure propaganda when 'creativity' is understood as the expression of an undivided voice rather than of the tension between immediately irreconcilable interests. And it is exactly the cohesive 'flow' of individual voices within society that the films celebrate. The Griersonian influence does seem to have been wrongly cast into the 'liberal' camp. There is nothing liberal, for example, about the Jennings-McAllister documentaries. They are brilliantly constructed pieces of propagandist mythology, whose co-ordinates Vaughan insightfully enumerates: 'The myth of night work, of public usefulness, of the small group operating in functional equality, of immediate isolation balanced by access to a nationwide network of communion and support.'

It is inevitable, perhaps, in a book with such wide-ranging ambitions that more questions are raised than answered. The challenging, and at times contradictory, mix of critical and social analysis leads to much useful illumination of specific sequences. But the wider ideological relationship between film-makers and bureaucrats is never analysed in any depth. For example, Listen to Britain is described in terms of an unproblematic representation of a democratic country, in which various subjectivities, like classes, are woven into a social unity. What unites and gives meaning to the disparate cultural traditions is, as Vaughan points out, the consensus voice of the BBC radio service, that 'nationwide network of communion and support'. At a time of grave external threat, of course, minority views rarely become dissenting voices, but it remains true that the absence of debate places the film outside ostensibly democratic traditions.

In re-evaluating 'auteurist' articles of faith through the Jenningsrelationship, McAllister book's perspective remains closely bound up with traditional notions of creativity and never provides a viable alternative viewpoint. Since the beneficial role of documentary as a tool of social education is itself an aesthetic 'credo', it would have been most interesting to learn about McAllister's relationship with Grierson. As the unit's first-string editor, he handled the detailed daily execution of Grierson's overall brief. After the war, Grierson went on to found the National Film Board of Canada. McAllister himself followed other Grierson protégés into the new film units at British Transport, Shell and the National Coal Board.

The book outlines, from painstaking research, how the film editor's career lost its sense of direction and declined into petty bureaucratic squabbling. doesn't examine why the postwar Welfare State effectively ignored direct state sponsorship of films in favour of indirect patronage through the television licence fee system. In this context, the central relationship in the British Documentary Tradition between the aesthetics of social responsibility and the politics of 'liberal democracy' may not have altered as much as is made out by the advent of fly-on-the-wall television documentary. It is probably the film editing skill of maintaining the smooth flow of widely differing subject matter and creative impulses that is that tradition's most important contribution to televison.

ROBERT BROWN

#### Westerns

THE WESTERN
(Aurum Film Encyclopedia
Volume 1)
by Phil Hardy
Aurum Press/£14.95

Eight more volumes are on the way, devoted to Science Fiction, Horror, Comedy, Romance, War, Epics, Musicals and Thrillers. If the others are as good as this one, it's bad news for the pocket. Prepare to dig deep and without grudge, though, since *The Western* is an invaluable reference tool, beautifully as well as generously illustrated, and cheap at the price.

Remainder shops are littered with so-called reference books which are all too clearly little more than scissoring and pasting jobs. But Phil Hardy, though he has obviously seen a lot of Westerns, makes no pretence of having seen everything he writes about. Where he has, his critical comments steer a nice line between opinionated persuasiveness on Westerns dear to his heart (e.g. Guns, Pursued, Fort Forty Apache) and open-minded fairness to those dearer to alien critical attitudes (e.g. Duel in the Sun, High Noon, Shane). Above all, he is not afraid to rehabilitate a selfconsciously A (for adult) Western like The Ox-Bow Incident, at present languishing in fashionable disrepute, or to go out on a limb celebrate superior but neglected B movies like Ulmer's

The Naked Dawn, Andre De Toth's Ramrod, Phil Karlson's Thunderhoof or George Sherman's Black Bart.

Where Hardy hasn't seen a film, his comments are a model of helpful signposting, combining educated guesswork with an informed research into available critical sources. Informed is the key word here, since those sources still hold traps for the unwary. But Hardy firmly puts down a whole string of perennial sacred cows, starting with the 1929 version of *The Virginian* and the Oscar-winning *Cimarron* of 1931.

With the silent Western still an uncharted wilderness, because only a tiny handful of films has been available for reassessment over the last fifty years, Hardy wisely limits his encyclopedia to the sound era. But the silents are also omitted for reasons of space, since the sound period alone produces over 1,800 entries (each title accompanied by basic credits and critical comment), plus a checklist of some 2,000 titles not worthy of consideration in more detail.

The entries are arranged alphabetically by annual batches, so that one can see at a glance what films were made in any particular year. Particularly fascinating given the perennial rise and fall of Western stars, directors, writers

and fashions. But also particularly helpful given the way the genre constantly renewed itself. In a lucidly intelligent introduction, Hardy approaches the knotty problem of defining the Western primarily by demonstrating how theorists like Warshow and Bazin were trapped by their own preconceptions into making straitjacket categorisations which were subsequently disproved as the Western became increasingly—for want of a better word—adult.

The book is admirably laid out, with a secondary introduction to each decade noting key departures, so as to facilitate appreciation not only of the progress of these developments and their gradual integration into the genre, but of their precursors. Despite an excusable flurry of proofreading errors, minor misspellings and one alarming howler when the introduction refers to My Darling Clementine (' ... the scent Fonda wears to court Linda Darnell'), the book seems admirably accurate and exhaustive. No prizes to Ford fans for leaping to the defence of Wyatt Earp and his Clementine, whom he wooed drenched in hair-oil (nothing so ungentlemanly as scent) and who was played by Cathy Downs.

TOM MILNE

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#### **LETTERS**

#### **Housing Problems**

sir,—Robert Murphy's article 'The Public has a Brain...' (Winter 1983/84) reports an encouraging development of common sense within the film distribution and circuit industries. But while the quality and variety of films is improving, the basic problem of how to house them remains.

The public image of the big circuit cinemas remains dreadful, often not without reason. The only long-term solution for this can be cinemas with comfortable auditoria; with proper bars, snack bars, and possibly restaurants; with comfortable foyers; with smartly presented and welltrained staff. In addition, the marketing must go beyond the standard desultory weekly ad in the local newspaper. Informative leaflets, wider poster distribution, and a tougher, more imaginative marketing approach generally are necessary, to get across to an audience which, as Robert Murphy says, is no longer automatically interested in cinema or films. Advance booking, with numbered seats, should surely be standard practice by now. In other words, the cinema houses need to be brought in line with public expectations in the 1980s.

All these facilities are taken for

granted in the theatre in this country. Indeed, many theatres and multi-purpose auditoria, in particular in the civic sector, now feature film successfully as part of their programme. The frustration for such venues is that they are barred by the local circuit cinema from first run screenings, and often, for a long period, from second run screenings. Despite this, it is my experience from programming film in such a venue that increasing numbers will wait for a film to appear there, rather than see it at the down-at-heel local cinema. Perhaps more significantly, a large part of our film audience stopped going to the cinema many years ago, but will come to a modern theatre to see the kind of successful film Robert Murphy enumerates.

There is still a market for public film screenings, much of it untapped. But enormous investment is required to make a serious attempt to capture it. The problem, of course, is financial. However, unless the backing is found (and I believe that central government—the Arts Council has, after all, a 'Housing the Arts' policy—have some responsibility here) then the circuits will die. The civic theatres and venues, who have the other enormous advantage of not having to pro-

gramme film 52 weeks a year, may well then be the principal outlets. A further factor here is that many councils, desperately looking for cutbacks, are seeing that to show film requires much less financial commitment, and possible loss, than live theatre and concerts, and may well put pressure on their venues to expand the allocation of film in their overall programme. It would be ironic indeed if film was to be promoted at the expense of the live theatre and concerts.

Yours faithfully, MICHAEL EAKIN Beck Theatre Hayes, Middx

#### **Film Societies**

SIR,—You can see SIGHT AND SOUND films outside London, often within months of their opening—at a film society. In his interesting article 'Art House' in the Winter issue Guy Phelps relegates film societies to a footnote, though he points out that the 16mm market generally produces more revenue than 35mm commercial bookings outside London.

It is true that Britain's 450 film societies operate within the constraints of membership systems, like the National Film Theatre itself. Many are also restricted to people who study or work at a particular institution. Nevertheless, there are currently 205 film societies throughout Britain which the general public may join. In most cities, towns, villages and even on some islands a modest subscription brings admission to a score of films in the traditional winter season from September to May. Thanks to volunteer organisers and enthusiasm the running costs of film societies are low and hence the value for money they offer is exceptional. I would be happy to advise readers of their nearest UK film society if they write to me at: BFFS, 81 Dean Street, London WIV 6AA.

What sort of films might you expect to see at a local film society? A glance at a sample of 100 programmes shows 10 screening Charles and Lucie, 10 showing The German Sisters, 20 listing Hammett and nearly 30 presenting Yol. Without film societies most communities would not have a chance to see such films in cinema presentation. Indeed Charles and Lucie is a film that would not have been seen on 16mm and hence scarcely shown outside London and the Regional Film Theatres without the direct. intervention of the British Federation of Film Societies.

The film society movement is not wedded to 16mm film. Some use 35mm and a small number is beginning to use video as the equipment and software become readily and legally available. Despite the financial problems

faced by all leisure activities in recent years, film societies continue to survive and show signs of rallying. No matter how much may be piped into our homes in future, there will always be a discerning audience that wants to share the experience of watching film and of discussing it afterwards formally or informally. It is to serve them that film societies will continue to thrive—and to deserve more than just an honourable footnote in the documentation of the film culture.

Yours faithfully, DAVID WATTERSON General Secretary

#### **Scotch Myths**

SIR,—It's encouraging that an officer of the Scottish Film Council should engage in the issues raised by the current crop of Scottish films ('Land Beyond Brigadoon' by John Brown, SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1983/84).

In the case of our Scotch Myths, the struggle to bring this to the screen, on our own terms, goes far further back than John Brown imagines. The script was first commissioned by BBC Scotland in 1975 (the ideas having been previously rejected by Films of Scotland). The then BBC Controller, Pat Walker, saw our film as an important corrective to the high tartan ingredient always requested from Scotland by the network planners. The project was paid for and given 'definitemaybe' status, as we continued to gather in more and more appalling kitsch material, which in frustration to all the production delays, we mounted as the exhibition, 'Scotch Myths'.

The pun in *Breeksadoon* was not our invention but Perth Theatre's own response to the news that their neighbouring 'theatre-in-the-hills' at Pitlochry was mounting an 'authentic' version of *Brigadoon*, Perth handed us the title and commissioned the play and the successful response led to the commission from Channel 4.

We are only sad that John Brown didn't credit Sam Fuller with a very good performance as Gene Kelly too. This reference to *Brigadoon* is every bit as important to us as the parallel tourist sequence based on the false expectations generated by Scottish tourist promoters.

This year's Hogmanay/New Year television offerings from Scotland continue to show a 'Land Within Brigadoon.'

Yours faithfully, BARBARA and MURRAY GRIGOR Fife, Scotland

sir,—I must say that I enjoyed John Brown's intelligent and erudite comments on the state of Scottish film-making. However...

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The photograph from Hero did not contain an image of Simon Perry (producer of Another Time, Another Place) but of Alastair Kenneil who played Fionn Mac-Cumhail. I'm sure Simon Perry would be highly amused to hear of his appearance in Hero.

Yours faithfully, SUSIE NEILSON Scottish Film Unit BBC, Glasgow

Apologies to all concerned for a Scotch myth—Editor

#### **High Seas**

SIR,—May I point out a couple of errors in Thomas Elsaesser's article 'High Seas' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1983/84). The documentary film made for INA by Edgardo Cozarinsky, Autoportrait d'un Inconnu, was intended to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Jean Cocteau's death, not the centenary of his birth, which will be in 1989. And the title of Raul (or Raoul) Ruiz's Le Toit de la Baleine ought to be rendered in English not as 'On Top of the

Whale', which in this context is quite meaningless, but by its literal translation, 'The Roof of the Whale', a phrase commonly found in Icelandic eddas as a metaphor for the sea.

Yours faithfully, GILBERT ADAIR London N1

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

TERRY DOYLE is Senior Producer in BBC TV's Continuing Education Department, responsible for forlanguage programmes eign (Greek—language and people) ... TIMOTHY HOLLINS was until recently Research Fellow in the Broadcasting Research Unit. His book Beyond Broadcasting: Into the Cable Age is being published by the BFI in April ... MARK LE FANU is a freelance journalist and teacher, based in London JORGE POSADA moved to the US from Cuba in 1980 and works as a teacher and translator, also writing short stories for Spanish magazines.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for Christine, The Right Stuff, Blow Out, Scarface, Domicile Conjugal, photograph of Nestor Almendros, Dustin Hoffman. 20th CENTURY-FOX for Dressed to Kill, The Fury.
UIP for Rumble Fish, Days of Heaven, Sophie's Choice, Carrie. GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for La Balance, La Marquise d'O, Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent. VIRGIN FILMS for Another

Country.
COURT HOUSE FILMS for

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UMBRELLA FILMS for Loose Connections.

ROAD MOVIES/BFI PRODUCTION for Flight to Berlin.

SIXPENCE PRODUCTIONS for Lousy Little Sixpence.

INA for Liberté, la Nuit. LES FILMS DU CAROSSE for Ma Nuit chez Maud.

Hatte the Made.

AIP for photographs of Mamoun Hassan, Jeremy Isaacs, David Puttnam, Simon Perry.

BRITISH TELECOM for cable photographs.

PLESSEY SCIENTIFIC-ATLANTA for cable diagram.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM for frame stills from concentration camp film.

ATELIER KONINCK for illustrations in Mark Le Fanu's article.

BBC ENTERPRISES for The Weather in the Streets.
BBC TV for An Englishman Abroad, Orwell on Jura, 1984, photograph of Alan Bennett.
GRANADA TELEVISION for The Road to 1984, photograph of Lord Bernstein.

CENTRAL TELEVISION for Spitting Image.

TERRY DOYLE for photographs in Soviet television article.
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NIRAD MOHAPATRA for Maya Miriga.

PETER TANNER for photograph of himself.

BFI PUBLISHING for photograph of Stewart McAllister.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for Lotte Eisner in Germany, The Wind, 1984, Daydreams, photographs of Ivor Montagu, Alfred Hitchcock, Gavin Millar.

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# FILM

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## ON NOW

●THE BIG CHILL (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

In his second feature as director, Lawrence Kasdan, formerly a co-writer of Hollywood blockbusters, skilfully revamps yet another formula. The suicide of one of their number reunites a small circle of college friends over a weekend in a Southern mansion. With changed circumstances, this might have been British television fare. The present players, however, have the innate confidence to pitch their performances high (i.e. they all have a fair measure of star quality). Notwithstanding the familiarity of the story (written by Kasdan and Barbara Benedek), this lifts *The Big Chill* to the level of an entertainment in which humour and sentiment are finely balanced and profundities are artfully skirted. (Tom Berenger, Glenn Close, Kevin Kline, William Hurt, Jeff Goldblum, Mary Kay Place, Meg Tilly, JoBeth Williams.)

#### **OUNDER FIRE**

(Rank) A complex, genuinely thrilling drama of commitment, the mercenary mentality and the tortuous ironies of history. Roger Spottiswoode's controversial scrutiny of us intervention in Central America takes, if anything, greater risks with its investigation of the political ramifications of image-making itself. Putting an intelligently judged distance between his own action-melodrama and its generic antecedents (Casablanca, etc), he nags sharply at questions of the commodity value of 'genre' images stolen by freelance lensman Nick Nolte, interrogates the positive and negative implications of taking pictures rather than sides, and traces the foggy process of individual political development against a vivid Nicaraguan background. A credible confusion of means and ends emerges within the clear-sighted narrative of this unexpected movie: the best of its rare ilk since Medium Cool. (Gene Hackman, Joanna Cassidy, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Ed Harris.)

#### BEFORE THE NICKELODEON (BFI)

Affectionate, somewhat superficial hour-long recapitulation of the achievements of movie pioneer Edwin S. Porter, which has the salutary effect of rekindling interest in the films themselves. (Director, Charles Musser.)

#### THE BLOOD OF DR JEKYLL

New Realm) Caveat emptor: Borowczyk's

mockingly macabre account of Stevenson's tale is being shown in a mangled 'English version' so rudely cut that it is difficult to be sure of tone or tempo. Full of fun and fetishism, it veers between plain absurdity and rich suggestiveness as Borowczyk continues his love-hate affair with all things Victorian. Who else would think of draping a girl over a treadle sewing-machine as an image of erotic invitation? (Udo Kier, Marina Pierro, Patrick Magee.)

#### **CHAMPIONS**

Fox) Real-life story of a winning Grand National team which had to overcome mortal illness (the jockey) and grave injury (the horse) to make the winning-post. Told as an indecent tearjerker, directed by John Irvin with the discretion of a rampaging steamroller. (John Hurt, Jan Francis, Ben Johnson.)

#### THE COUNTRY GIRLS

(Enterprise Catholic girlhood in 1950s Ireland: Desmond Davis' and Edna O'Brien's prequel to *The*Girl with Green Eyes may be
belated but emerges as a model of unaffected reminiscence. Period detail and humour are unforced and the sense of proportion precisely maintained. (Sam Neill, Maeve Germaine, Jill

#### CURSE OF THE PINK PANTHER (UIP)

Almost like talismans of commercial success, the artefacts of Sellers-as-Clouseau—his trenchcoat, his accent, waxworks of his various disguises—are exhibited in another bout of film-making-as-tomb-robbing. The surrounding non-comedy, with uncomical Ted Wass as the Clouseau substitute, is an odd monument. (David Niven, Herbert Lom, Joanna Lumley; director, Blake Edwards.)

#### THE DEATH OF MARIO RICCI

(Gala) After a taut and allusive start, Claude Goretta's movie about a newsman stumbling on a Swiss small-town scandal bogs down, despite sharp detail and smooth technique, in predictability and more than a hint of smugness (Gian-Maria Volonté, Mimsy Farmer, Heinz Bennent.)

**DREAM FLIGHTS** 

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
A big hit on its Soviet home ground, this rather meandering comedy about a non-conformist draughtsman apprehensively approaching his 40th birthday might be thought to offer domestic audiences both vicarious satisfaction and elements of a cautionary tale. (Oleg Yankovsky, Liudmila Gurchenko; director, Roman Balayan.)

THE DRESSER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner) A straightforward, barely 'opened out' transcription of Ronald Harwood's play about a Wolfitlike ham and his alternately bullying and cajoling homosexual dresser. Albert Finney and Tom Courtenay dutifully chew up the

scenery, unlike Peter Yates who fulfils his contract with a minimum of directorial mediation.

HEART LIKE A WHEEL

(Mainline. Jonathan Kaplan's marvellous biopic traces Shirley Muldowney's rise to fame in the male-dominated world of hot rod racing. Triumphs on the track are subtly played down in favour of struggles with conflicting pressures around work, family and relationships, and the insidious pressures of everyday sexism. Bonnie Bedelia's understated performance is magnificent. (Beau Bridges, Leo

#### OVER THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

(Cannon) Old-fashioned comedy with Elliott Gould as small-time Jewish businessman trying to better himself. Agreeable moments, mawkish ending, powerhouse cameo by Sid Caesar as domineering uncle. (Margaux Hemingway, Shelley Winters; director, Menahem Golan.)

**PARADE** 

(Blue Dolphin)
Jacques Tati in his last picture
(1974) performs the old mimesthe Boxer, the Equestrian, the Angler-before the Family of Man crammed rather awkwardly into a Swedish circus. Something of a muddle, the film is dominated by a tone of frequently painful pathos; it has, however, moments of great good humour and flashes of incomparable magic.

SCARFACE (UIP)

This 'new' version of Scarface carries a tribute to Howard Hawks and Ben Hecht, but otherwise only drags in the original as a way of shoring up its rickety sociology about Cuban emigrants to Florida taking over the cocaine trade. Wanly oldfashioned in its morality and despite oodles of violence—inadequately dramatised. (Al Pacino, Steven Bauer; director, Brian De Palma.)

SILKWOOD

(Rank) Silkwood is to the current crop of films about the dangers of the nuclear industry much as Coming Home was to the Vietnam vet cycle—an epic liberal statement, concentrating on a domestic ménage à trois and finally as indeterminate in effect as the real-life case on which it is based (Karen Silkwood died in a mysterious, one-car accident). (Meryl Streep, Kurt Russell, Cher; director, Mike Nichols.)

STAR 80

(Columbia-EMI-Warner) Bob Fosse's repellently flashy interpretation of the brief fame and brutal murder of Playboy playmate Dorothy Stratten. Obviously intended as a cautionary tale for our times, with its beautiful dreamers and ruthless schemers stridently peopling a colour supplement world of success. (Mariel Hemingway, Eric Roberts, Cliff Robertson.)

STARSTRUCK

(Entertainment) A 'comic rock musical' with newcomers Jo Kennedy and Ross O'Donovan as the showbiz-struck punkette in pursuit of a brilliant career and her pint-sized impresario. Gillian Armstrong's wayward sense of humour and her ironic counterpointing of cosmopolitan glitz and Sydney working-class grit compensate for some undistinguished song-anddance routines.

#### **STREAMERS**

(Rank) Another play, another pressure-cooker situation (this time an army barracks rife with notions of class, sex, race and glory) which, as in Come Back to the 5 & Dime, lets Altman explore a group and the lies by which they try to live. Schematic but riveting. (Matthew Modine, Mitchell Lichtenstein, Michael Wright.)

#### TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

An outsize sit-com and a crassly constructed slice of antifeminism that contrives to rub liberal amounts of soap in the viewers' eyes. Shirley MacLaine is the mellowing mommie dearest whose wise infant grows up to be Debra Winger; Jack Nicholson the earthy former star-voyager next door in Houston; cancer the escape hatch for a hiccupping 30year narrative of emotional peaks and troughs. (Director, James L. Brooks.)

TESTAMENT (UIP)

Or what happens to one California family after the Bomb. The subject has a certain in-built effectiveness, of course, but manifestly humane intentions are unable to transcend the soap opera terms of reference. (Jane Alexander, William Devane, Ross Harris; director, Lynne Littman.)

#### TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Mel Brooks and the Nazis, a cherished dream at last come true. Alan Johnson, the director and formerly Brooks' long-time choreographer, prevents the comedian from going too far over the top in this pacy remake of Lubitsch's black wartime comedy, about an egotistical actor-manager forced to 'act' in Occupied Warsaw. (Anne Bancroft, Charles Durning.)

(Contemporary)
Gleb Panfilov's handsomely
mounted adaptation of a Gorky
play about the incipient decline of a shipbuilding family in 1913 Russia. Commanding central performance by Inna Churikova, but hampered by some simplifications and longueurs. (Vadim Medvedev, Nikolai Skorobogatov.)

YENTL

Barbra Streisand, the only begetter of this musical drawn from I. B. Singer's story about a smart girl determined to defy convention to become a Yeshiva boy, is notably sympathetic in a role where emotionalism is (sometimes) kept in check by plot. (Mandy Patinkin.)

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GETTING IN ON THE ACTION (Alistair Scott and others) –
a documentary workshop production (on the making of LOCAL HERO)

Gold Hugo, Chicago (Video Section):

CARRY GREENHAM HOME (Beeban Kidron and Amanda Richardson) –

a first year production

Silver Plaque, Chicago (Student Section): THE DEVOTEE (Brian Gilbert) – a graduation film (photographed by Martin Fuhrer)

> Special Jury Prize, Tours: SISTER (Revel Fox) – a graduation film

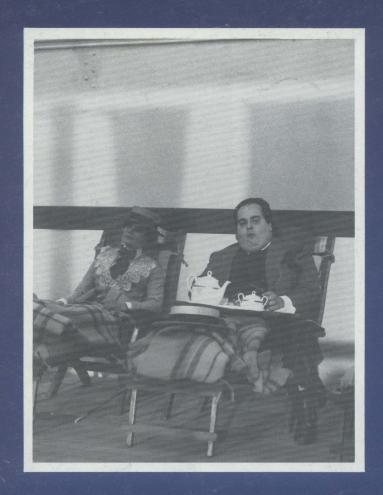
Mention for Mise en Scene, Tours: THE DEVOTEE - (Brian Gilbert)

Special Prize for the Most Professional Production, Munich Student Festival:
JOHN, LOVE (John Davis); LOS VALIENTES (Cavan Greenwood);
SNAKES 'N' LADDERS (Harry Hook) and GOLDEN GRAPE (Nick Willing)
– all graduation films.

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